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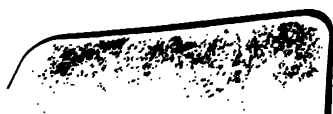
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AULD LANG SYNE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"THE WRECK OF THE 'GROSVENOR.'"

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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1

AULD LANG SYNE.



CHAPTER I.

MOTHER MEAD.


“But so it was. And let the reader cease to wonder ; for affliction is a divine diet, which, though it be not pleasing to mankind, yet Almighty God hath often, very often, imposed it, as good, though bitter physic, to those children whose souls are dearest to Him.”—WALTON.

It had been a sudden sickness and a dreadful giddiness that had caused Jenny to sink on the floor, from which she recovered soon after her father had quitted the house for his visit to Grey-stone School. The wild distraction in her eyes had repelled Mrs. Strangfield, and for mercy and dread the mother asked no

questions, but sat, silent and sighing, watching her daughter with piteous concern.

Then her duties calling her, and thinking besides that solitude would be precious to such bitter grief as Jenny's, Mrs. Strangfield gently left the room.

No sooner was she gone than Jenny started to her feet, and paced about as though seized with madness, with a frown upon her forehead, and her hands pressing tightly below her hips. Full realization of what had befallen her had come to her heart, and she was driven by intolerable agony of spirit. That Cuthbert had left her of his own will did not come into her mind. Belief in love does not fall dead in this way. And no one had yet suggested to her, as kindly solution of the mystery of his disappearance, that it might be he had taken a sudden shame



of her as his wife and had left her, acting a sweet part up to the last hour—for men are shocking deceivers.

What, then, did she think? Why, that some accident had befallen him; and the idea that he might be lying dead in some hidden place so frenzied her, that, without consideration of her purpose, she fled upstairs for her hat and left the house to seek him.


She had wandered beyond the market-place, when her mind took a grasp of her intention, and that brought her to a stand. The mid-day sun beat fiercely upon the road, and held the pavements tolerably empty. But there were people in the shops, and they stared at her as she stood; perceiving which, she went down the street again, with her heart beating furiously over a new-born resolution to call on Dr. Shaw, and begin her

inquiries after her husband at his own home.

But when she had got as far as the market-place, the fame of Mother Mead, as a gossip and teller of fortunes, occurred to her ; and this because she saw the old woman's bent figure going at a hobble on the other side of the market-place. So Jenny, passing quickly through the stalls, intercepted the dame as she was turning into the court in which she dwelt.

Mrs. Mead was talking to herself in a loud, quavering voice, and so completely engrossed with witch-like thoughts—for what other thoughts could possibly visit such an ugly conformation?—that she did not observe Jenny, until she found herself stopped by the girl standing in front of her.

“Ah, Miss Jenny Strangfield—if that




be your rale name, my dear! A hot marn-ing, isn't it? with a power of dust for an old nose that finds snuff cruel dear. Why, your father is jest beyont—I am now from him—and Lard! his eyes are in such a blaze that my old skin cracked when he looked at me."

"May I speak with you in your house, Mrs. Mead? I am in great trouble."

At sight of the sad, sweet face, Mrs. Mead's ugly countenance underwent a kind of transformation. Her nose and chin did not, indeed, moderate their intimacy; but the blood-shot old eye took a sudden light of compassion, and a strange grin of good-nature overspread her face.

"Come along, my dear," she exclaimed, "if ye're not above being seen with sitch a scarecrow as me. Lard bless your heart! the truth's never hard to old ears

that carries wool in 'em. When I was a gel—your height, my dear—I had a fine sweetheart. He coorted me in silk stockings, he did, an' that's as true as that this hand's atop o' the other. Ah, but it is, though. A handsome upright man he was, as iver you'd wish to see, but lost his head to a recruiting officer, and got killed somewheers wi' a furrin name. D'ye think I wur always shell-backed? My dear, I was as straight as you are at your age, though I never had your peach cheeks and pretty hair. Well, well, that old Goody Mead should be rattlin' about herself, when they say she knows no business but her neighbours'! Stoop your head, for 'tis an old-fashioned door, built afore palaces was known. There's a strong chair that'll hold thee; and if I can comfort you, my pretty, I'll mop out my old heart to do it, I'll warrant."



They had arrived at a rickety old house, with a sitting-room very abruptly entered from the street. This room and a bed-chamber adjacent composed Mrs. Mead's dwelling. Overhead lived a tailor and his consumptive wife, and in a wicker-cage a thrush, that sang, peradventure, to prove that even abject poverty has its sweetness. But abject poverty was upstairs, and was no lodger with Mrs. Mead. How the old woman got money no one knew ; but her two rooms were clean, the furniture decent, with a store of coal in the back yard, and tolerable cheer (as the tailor and his wife upstairs could vouch for) in the cupboard behind the chair which Jenny occupied.

Taking a seat opposite the girl, she ran her eyes over her from top to toe.


"Now, my child," said she, "what can I do ? Is it your fortune you want told ?

Nay, nay, there's no physie in such stuff for rale trouble. It's good for foolish wenches whose brains are made o' ribbon, but not for the likes o' thee, dearie."

"I am in bitter trouble indeed, Mrs. Mead. Mr. Shaw, the son of the doctor, is missing, and I am mad to know where he is," said Jenny, bending her pale face forward as she spoke.

"Likely enough, my dear—he had the most noble face that iver I see on a man. What was he to thee? Your answer shall be sacred with me. Speak the worst, if harm hath come to ye. You'll find Judith Mead dumb as your own heart."

"He was my husband," replied Jenny, in a voice scarcely above a whisper, for the secret was still so fresh that the revelation of it startled her to hear, though spoken with her own voice.



Mrs. Mead screwed up her eyes to look at the girl, until the upper part of her face was a mask of wrinkles.

“Your husband!” she exclaimed, in a tone and with a manner that would have made it impossible for a third person to know whether she believed the girl or not; for, as to Jenny, it could not occur to her that her word would be doubted. “Why, then, no wonder his going troubles ye.”

“Oh, Mrs. Mead, why do you say ‘his going’? He has not left his home, do you think? Is it not possible that he has somewhere met with an accident? Or has his father forced him to leave? On Wednesday he promised me to call last night on father, and break the news of our marriage, for all this while was it our hidden secret. What should prevent him coming? Oh, Mrs. Mead, he loves

me truly, and would be with me if he could come. Can he be dead? Oh, kind God! if I thought this I would kill myself, that I might be dead with him."

"My dear," said Mrs. Mead slowly, and reflecting hard whilst she spoke, "he is not dead. Folks do not die like this without it being known. Where could he die? Coming to call on father? Then his body would ha' been found—for the Lord knows they've bin sarching closely enough; an' unless he's gone up to heaven, clothes an' all, like the Prophet Elijah, you may be sure he's walkin' about on this world somewheers, hale an' hearty. Did they tell 'ee there was a press-gang here last night? But ye mustn't look to that. They'd never take a slender man like him. Billy Basings they forced away, but he's a strapping sailor. Mr. Shaw's meat for their mas-

ters, and the wagabone plunderers 'ud never burn their fingers on *him*."

She shook her head emphatically.

"He's your husband, is he, my dear? That's beyond doubt, I hope?"

"Oh yes, Mrs. Mead; we were married in a church in London three weeks ago."

"Ye're a soft little wench, and not larned in London ways. Are 'ee sure it was a church?"

"Oh yes, indeed—a large church!" exclaimed Jenny, gazing at the old woman with a new expression gathering in her eyes.

"Why, then, if ye knows the name, and got the bit o' paper they gi'es ye when folks are married——"

"I do not know the name of the church. I do not think my husband ever mentioned it. If any bit of paper was given to us he will have it. I was

ready to swoon for fear, and took no notice of anything, so scared was I. But this I have," she cried, drawing out a purse with quivering fingers and showing a wedding-ring.

The old woman put it aside with a movement of her hand.

"You know if it be right wi' thee," said she; "but the ring's only worth what it 'ud fetch as gold."

Something in these words, something in the irrepressible leer that weighted the old woman's eyelids, took Jenny's breath away. And then instantaneously there flashed upon her the sense and knowledge of the false and fearful position she was placed in by her husband's disappearance.

She started to her feet.

"Oh, Mrs. Mead!" she half shrieked through her pale lips, "is it possible that

my words will not be believed? Great God! will it be thought that I am not Cuthbert Shaw's wife?"

And then recalling her father's iron nature, and his hard rejection of unsupported words, and his evil, unsparing habit of thinking the worst, her heart seemed to stand still, and she remained motionless and frozen, with her hands locked and her teeth clenched.

"Sit down, my dear, sit down, and do not run clane daft, for there's nothing heavy the matter yet," creaked the old woman, again inspecting Jenny closely, motioning her the while to be seated by arching her hands out of her shoulders like a rabbit's paws. "If he's your sweet-heart, ye must have some faith in him, and maybe he'll be turning up in a day or two, and then the laugh 'll be on thy side. Do ye hear?"

“He is my husband,” said Jenny in a sobbing whisper, breathing quickly.

“Well, well, husband or sweetheart, if he comes he’ll be welcome, won’t he now, dearie ? ”

“My husband !” shrieked the girl, with a wild stamp of the foot. “Will it not be believed ! ”


“Why, to be sure it will. But see. I’m an old, lorn woman, who knows the world as thy father knows the Bible—all the harm of it, my dear ; and if you was my child, this would I say,—hold thy peace about your marriage until you can show proof, that Satan himself wouldn’t doubt, that young Mr. Shaw is thy husband. What ! will you make envious wenches and their flabbergoon mothers believe ye by saying, ‘I do not know the name of the church where I was married, and I have no bit o’ paper’ (the Lard

knows what them things are called) ‘to prove that Mr. Shaw is my husband ; and ’tis the truth itself that ne’er a living cratur’, my own father not excepting, knew that I was Shaw’s wife until this blessed day, when my husband hath left me to give the news o’ my marriage alone !’”

She ceased leering shrewdly, with a forefinger against her nose.

The stunned look that had settled upon Jenny’s face while the old woman was speaking, passed a moment or two after she ceased, and a strange and striking character was given to her beauty by an expression, which it seems absurd to describe as a mingling of despair and determination, yet which assuredly suggested both these qualities.

“I see that a great trouble is come upon me ; but in the sight of God my heart is pure,” she said, in a low but




steady voice. "Mrs. Mead, speak to me honestly, and tell me what you think has become of my husband."

"My honesty won't ease you, my dear ; and the Lard knows I may be wrong, though folks think that it's the devil as gives me wisdom," said the old woman, showing her fangs with a grin of ill-dissembled triumph ; for in her own mind she had no doubt of the motive of Cuthbert's disappearance, and was flattered with the facile mastery that put her far ahead of the town's surmises.

"Pray answer me. I have the heart to listen to anything now, Mrs. Mead."

"Well," exclaimed Mrs. Mead, speaking slowly, intermitting her words for the sake of filling the spaces between with deliberate nods and shakes of the head, "they'll be thinking this of thee—that you are not married, and that Mr. Shaw



hath left you to bear your shame alone. They'll argey that the son of th' old popinjay up at the school-house 'ud never match with Mike Strangfield's darter, and that he hath ruined 'ee with promises. And maybe they'll say that th' old doctor's in the secret, and hath got his son away slyly to save him from the deacon. Unless you shall defeat the liars by sure proof of thy marriage, and that you must get about quickly."

Jenny stood looking at her with a steady, vacant gaze, as though she did not heed what was being said, and, with the same absent manner, was moving towards the door.

"How shall you get about it, dearie? You do not ask?"

"How?" exclaimed the girl, pausing. "If my husband does not come to me, I am quite helpless."


“Why, who should help ’ee but thy father? Let him go to work. He hath money and strength. If I was his wife he’d not sit idly cursing.”

And at the notion of the deacon cursing, she set up a creaking laugh. But such advice was lead instead of life to the poor heart that heard it.

“Good-bye, Mrs. Mead,” said she; “if you have news to comfort me, you will not keep me waiting for it?”

“Trust me! I’ll do my best. But I’ll not come anear thy house, though I had young Mr. Shaw in my arms. I’m none so dear to th’ deacon but that he’d bile me in his pitch-caldron, could he find a reason for murderin’ me i’ the Bible. As to thy mammy—— But there, dear heart! if I have good news you shall have it quickly.”

With pathetic effort to smile a farewell, Jenny left the house.



CHAPTER II.

HER FATHER-IN-LAW.

“ Now what could artless Jenny do ? ”

—*Burns.*

HER face like marble, but with no lack of determination in it, Jenny walked down the grimy court and crossed the market-place. She halted a moment to deliberate which way she should take to Greystone School. She chose the way of the sands, and down to the beach she went, with drooping head and frightened peeps at the people who passed her ; for on her now was cruel sense of heavy shame, and the

despair that bares the nerves of the heart
for the sunshine and human eyes to
torture.

Crossing the space of shingle on which
lay the fishing-boats roasting in the sun,
with hot smell of paint and tar exhaling,
her feet pressed the hard sand, and the
ocean lay close in a burnished, heaving
sheet. And now, being clear of the street,
the frown of deep and wondering sorrow
settled again upon her fair forehead.
What had imagination to say to her
soul's cry for her husband? Peering into
the caverns and hollows of the cliffs, with
here and there a pause before the grand
space of sea, with sad eyes questioning
the lustrous depths, she toiled along the
sands towards the ravine which led to
Greystone School. The sun, standing in
the south, left the sands shadowless; and
at the mouth of the ravine or gorge or

pass (these fissures have a dozen names), she seated herself for a little spell of rest, for nature was faint with fasting and the heavy load of trouble, and fierce pouring of the noontide blaze.

A pity now, if ever, that Echo was not the embodied spirit the ancients painted her; for, haunting the gloom and loneliness of these nodding heights, murmurous with the sea's wild moan, the nymph should have a whisper for the poor young wife to cheer her.

Her trouble was so new and strange that the wonder of it became as a dream, and she would start with a cry from the sense of madness impending.

Presently she began the ascent, hugging the steep side for the sweetness of its shadow, and passed the coastguard's hut, near which stood one of the 'prentives with a spy-glass. He stared hard at

her, as the most timid man in the world would, so provoking was her beauty ; and she was passing forward to escape his eyes, when a thought gave her courage to stop and ask a question.

“ They have been searching here and all about for a missing man this morning, I have heard,” said she. “ Pray can you tell me if any discovery has been made ? ”

“ You mean the master’s son at the house yonder ? ” replied the man, pointing with his thumb over his shoulder. “ Why, the fellow I relieved this morning told me as how some boys was gropin’ about this way—skylarkin’ a tidy bit, he reckoned, if the sarch was to be con-sidered serious. I don’t know much about it myself. Was he any con-nection o’ yours, miss ? ”

“ If he had fallen over the cliff,” she exclaimed, “ they would have been sure to

find his body on the sands this morning, would not they ? ”

“ I don’t see nothen to prevent it,” replied the man, tilting his hat over his nose to scratch the back of his head. “ The neaps is on all this week ; and if it was this way he fell, why, there he’d lie. Unless he took a jump—but even then he’d not come anear the flood.”

“ You have not heard that he has been seen ? I should say—would he be known to the coastguards ? ”

“ I really can’t answer that, miss. I was on duty at Caldpoint last night—a sight o’ distance from this here station,” answered the man, looking at her with an interrogative twist in the lay of his head.

There was no information to be got from him ; so, with a timid “ Thank you,” she went on her way.

When she caught sight of the school-

house the pulse of her heart grew smaller, and her feet dragged. To the nervous, modest girl, whose shy spirit all the might and fire of love had scarcely endowed with bravery enough to keep her bold in secret meetings with her own husband—whose coming to him was always a sweet scamper to his heart, and breathless concealment there until blushes waned under kisses, and courage rose to whispers—thoughts of an interview with the haughty little doctor, whose fiery prejudice had earned him hate and fame among the sect she belonged to—who had held her own Cuthbert in awe, and was always named by him with fear—was terrifying indeed.

But then, what would become of her if she had not spirit to push her quest into the presence of the one man who could, if he chose (as she believed), give her


more information concerning her husband than all the rest of the town put together? Bravely she stepped forward under a supporting impulse, and walked firmly to the door of the house.

The servant who answered the summons happened to be a Greystone woman, and knew Jenny well by sight. Much surprised she looked to behold the daughter following the father so quickly, for the deacon had not left the house five minutes when Jenny arrived.

“Can I see Dr. Shaw?”

“Yes, miss, I think so,” replied the servant, taking it for granted that Jenny knew her father had just called. “Will you walk in, please?”

Less impatient than Strangfield, Jenny waited until the woman came out of the study to request her to enter; and then, desperately gathering together her



energies, she went into the room. Now, Dr. Shaw was at this moment vehemently pacing the study, and revolving, with mingled emotions of horror, doubt, and rage, the communication Strangfield had made to him. Five minutes is no time for such spirits as his to grow calm in; and, with a desperate frown upon his forehead, he was muttering eagerly to himself, and in a quite audible key, when Jenny was announced.

“Show her in!” he exclaimed, astounded, and rooted himself against the table, confounded by this utterly unexpected and entirely new condition of the trouble that had come upon him.

The strange, pale beauty of Jenny’s face, and the hint of pride and the sorrowful dignity in her manner which were there, through her hard and violent effort after courage, made the old man stare at

her with unaffected surprise. Then, with an elaborate old-fashioned bow, he saluted her, and, coming round the table, placed a chair.

She addressed him at once in a sweet, plaintive voice, fixing her sad eyes on him.

“I have to beg your pardon for calling on you, but I am seeking my husband, whose home is here. They tell me he is gone ; but I cannot believe that he would have left me without sending me a message ; and, in my sorrow, whom should I come to but my husband’s father ?—though indeed, indeed, nothing but my misery would have made me intrude upon you.”

“No intrusion, Miss—Miss Strangfield—at least, ahem ! I am so much taken by surprise, madam, so little qualified at this moment to—to——”

The old gentleman smothered his incoherence with another bow, and, pulling out his snuff-box, looked shyly and frowningly upon the floor.

“It should have been Cuthbert’s duty to tell you we are married. I knew he had not done so, for last night he was to have seen father and broken the news to him; but he did not come, and this morning they say he is gone. Oh, Dr. Shaw! can you tell me where he is? Do you know? Have pity on me, sir! Without him I am very, very lonely; and if he does not bear witness to what I say, I—I——”

The poor girl broke down, biting her lip to subdue her tears, lest the sight of them should anger the old gentleman.

“I positively assure you that I am as ignorant of his whereabouts as yourself,” he replied hastily, that she might not

labour under a wrong impression one moment longer than he could help. "His ungrateful conduct has wounded me to the heart. All last night I sat up waiting for him, not doubting that he would return. But—may I ask you if you are aware that your father has just left me?"

She shook her head.

"He and I have been discussing the subject, and I can only trust," continued the doctor, "that, to my son's unnatural conduct to his father, he has not added a deeper, a more unpardonable, an inextinguishable offence."

"I am truly his wife, sir."

"Truly! Pray forgive me. I may lay rough fingers on a wound my heart would choose they should touch tenderly. But let me ask you—when were you married to my son?" said the doctor, forcing his

voice into a tone of suave composure ; for emotion could not be permitted to qualify his dear delight in asserting his elegance and breeding.

“ Three weeks ago,” replied Jenny, anxiously, with her heart beating painfully ; for she feared the next question.

“ He was in London three weeks ago. He went for a little holiday, as at that time I suspected his depression, or absent fits, were owing to the monotony of our scholastic discipline. Were you in London then ? ”

“ No, sir ; I was at Sydenham, stopping with my aunt Rachel. I met Cuthbert, by appointment, on a Wednesday morning at the bottom of a hill on the road to Dulwich, and there we took the coach that passed ; and afterwards, when we reached London, he put me into a hackney-coach, and we drove to a church where we were married.”

The doctor applied a pocket-handkerchief to his forehead.

“A strange rascal!” he muttered to himself. “I had never given him credit for so much duplicity.” And then he sighed and looked through the window, and, recollecting himself, forced his voice into suavity once more, and said—

“I represented to your father that nothing could be easier than to prove your marriage. If—as I do not doubt,” with a bland wave of the hand, “you are my son’s wife, I—I scarcely know whether there be cause to offer you my congratulations. Since he has played his father a vile trick, there is nothing to hinder him from deceiving you. But each to his kind : you to your father, to whom you are accountable, and my son to me—when he chooses to return.”

His whole manner had changed with

these words, and he addressed her with an icy hauteur of gaze.

Jenny looked at him fixedly for some moments, with a wonderful gaze of mingled consternation and disdain, and rose.

"I did not come here in expectation of finding sympathy or kindness," she exclaimed, with a bitterness that took a keener acidulation from the very beauty that should properly have failed to warrant it. "You know whose daughter I am; and what you think of my father Cuthbert has often told me. I have called to know if you can give me tidings of my husband. Doubt my honour as you please, sir; but, in God's name, answer me my question."

"I have answered that question," he replied. "Many of the elder boys of the school and several men were despatched

by me this morning to search the shore and the neighbourhood ; and likewise are inquiries still being made in places beyond Greystone. If I obtain information, be sure that I shall cause it speedily to be conveyed to you. Should he ever return," he continued, in slightly deepened tones, "this trouble he has brought upon you is an account to be settled between him and me, with an adjusting he will not relish."

She was standing near the door, and he was raising his hand to pull the bell ; but she had not done with him yet. The change in his manner from blandness to hauteur, from a kind of tenderness, at least, to a demeanour of blank indifference to her sorrow, deepened her doubt of his sincerity. A simple, country girl, reared by plain, outspoken parents, and habituated to the blunt expression of a com-

munity whose business was to ponder the path of their feet, and whose boast was that their eyelids looked straight before them, she had no cultivation to take at its worth the glaze of breeding with which men like Dr. Shaw overspread their manners, however excited by emotion; and, failing to find in this old man any such sorrowing after his son as should prove him honest to her own mourning heart, a feverish suspicion that he was holding back the truth seized her.

“You can tell me, sir, that he has not left me for good! Say some little word to give me hope! For *his* sake, Dr. Shaw—he loves me truly!” she cried, with her hands clasped.

The doctor was affronted by her doubt of him, for it was plain in her recurrent appeal.

"I have answered that I am as ignorant as you—perhaps more ignorant," he said, frowning at her.

"Last night," she continued, too bitterly yearning after hope to be abashed by his manner, or even to heed the cruel suggestiveness of his words, "he was to have seen father. This he promised, and I was to watch for him at my window. Oh, sir, he would not have bid me wait for him had he meant to deceive me; for, indeed, he loves me fondly. A gentleman from this school, who called on mother this morning, said that he had seen him leave your house in the evening; and to father he was coming—oh, be sure! Who stopped him, then? Was he followed and set upon? If he had died, or by an accident been killed, his body would have been found. Do you know where he is? Tell me, sir! The Lord God,

who hears me declare it, judges me; and before Him I swear thy son was my husband!"

Now, but for the continued and affronting suspicion informing the girl's words, this piteous appeal, taking tragic pathos from wild dry eyes and outstretched hands and shrill intensity of tone, must have roused the doctor though his heart of flesh had been as hard as a pet prejudice. But he was so extremely mortified to find his word—*his* word, too!—doubted by this wench, that anger came down on all kindly stirrings with a weight of lead, and false perceptions pricked him. For who was this woman but pig-headed Strangfield's daughter? And might not all this pother be a mere trick of the enemy—a plot, speedily hatched out of Cuthbert's strange disappearance, to mortify the dignified, cultured, well-bred foe

of Dissent, and champion of orthodoxy and divine rights?

He rang the bell.

“A direct answer has been given you,” he said, “and you must excuse me for declining to continue this conversation. I trust, madam, for your own sake, that you will be able to establish the fact of your honourable connection with my son.”

And, with dislike and contempt on his face, he made her a short bow. Without another word she passed through the door which the servant held open, and left the house.

CHAPTER III.

HOME AGAIN.

“That which is crooked cannot be made straight : and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.”

—*Eccles.* i. 15.

SHE walked slowly down the hot and dusty road towards the town. Now, far more keenly than before her visit to the school-house, did she feel the bitterness of her trouble. The sense of her loneliness was intolerable. She, whose beauty had always won love for her, whose gentle life no frown had ever darkened, who was dear to all who knew her for the sweet goodness and soft charms of

her character, had, in the space of a single morning, been rudely repulsed by her father, whose severity was never before hard to her; had brought tears from her mild mother's eyes and reproaches from her lips, and challenged disdain and doubt from the father of the man who was dearest of all earthly things to her divine and helpless innocence.

What had been her sin? That, loving well, she had confided wholly, betraying naught but her candour, which her father should have been merciful to, seeing that what was deceit to him, was the expression of beautiful allegiance to her husband.

Along the dusty road she went—the high crops motionless on either hand, the land around (in sheen of silver barley and yellow wheat, and the lustrous green

of meadow-grass) trembling in the steam of the sweltering earth—and felt a homeless woman, unloved, and sinful too.

She came at last to the shadow of the wayside trees under which she had met Cuthbert ; and here, with no eye to see her, and passionate memories crowding piteous misery into her aching heart, she stopped and flung herself upon the grass, and tried to relieve her burning eyes with tears.

A long while she lingered here, dreading to return home. Strange it was to behold her looking up and down the road and quickly around, as though she waited for some one who should now be with her. Then she cried to herself, “ Be calm ! be calm ! think of thy dear one’s words, and put them together with what thou hast this day heard, and strive to know where he is and why he has gone,

and if he will return." So, knitting her brow, and clasping her hands upon her knees, and bending downwards her tender, troubled eyes, she essayed to reason as a lawyer might. But to the poor heart the mystery of her bereavement was as a blank piece of paper, and all her hard thinking could make her sure of nothing else than that she was very lonely and helpless.

Time passed rapidly and unheeded, and the shadows of the trees had grown well into the road when she rose to her feet, disturbed by the town clock striking the half-hour after three. The thought of meeting her father was almost unbearable; yet home she must go, for where was other shelter for her? Before this time her fear of the deacon was in his anger, when he should learn that she had deceived him by her secret marriage.

Nothing more had her innocence then to dread; though enough had been here to furnish her with dismal contemplation and trembling apprehension, and an insupportable yearning for the permanent companionship of her husband, that discovery might never catch her without the prop of his love and presence at hand for her weakness. But now her husband was gone, and, by going, had left her exposed to dreadful suspicion. He was gone, and she was left alone to justify her purity, to encounter the wrath of her father, stirred to his deepest heart by infamous doubt.


What, then, was she to do? for when she fell to consider how she should prove her marriage, she found another blank as maddeningly perplexing as Cuthbert's disappearance.

She well remembered the marriage-

morn: how, with a faint voice and pale face, she told aunt Rachel she was going for a walk, and bade her not be surprised if she delayed her return, for she loved the pretty scenery around, and to linger among the trees.

She well remembered the beating of her heart when, at the bottom of a deep and shady lane, she beheld Cuthbert waiting for her, and how she had nearly swooned when he hailed the passing coach to Southwark, and handed her into it.

Likewise she well remembered how they had emerged into a crowded street, along which he had hurried her into another street, where he called a hackney-carriage, and they were driven down interminable streets at which she never glanced, for her white face was hidden on Cuthbert's shoulder, and she had needed



all the cordial of his constant, passionate, reassuring whispers to save her from fainting.

And how at last the carriage stopped before a church—a gloomy, heavy City edifice—so that it seemed to her they had to grope their way along the avenue of high pews to the altar-railing, where speedily a thin voice read the service that made her the wife of the man at her side.

The acted portion of it all was a vague memory; her love for the man who had induced her to secretly wed him was only reality.

Four o'clock was chiming when she reached home. Long before this had Mrs. Strangfield grown weary of watching at the window, and with deep anxiety had gone to seek the girl in the town. Polly was singing in the kitchen as she scrubbed the floor, so that Mr. Strangfield in the

parlour did not hear Jenny enter, nor her light footstep as she went upstairs.

At her bedroom door she halted, with such a shock of surprise and consternation as the sight of a dead man might have produced on her; for all about the window the floor was littered with her husband's sacred letters, heedlessly tossed and lying open, with their riband-bindings among them.

She well knew whose hand had done this; and, recovering herself, entered the room, closed the door, and removed her hat, moving softly, and all the while looking at the letters.

This done, she knelt down and gathered together the precious missives, pressing them often to her pale lips, and narrowly inspecting the carpet for bits of the dry forget-me-nots and other fragments of flowers which had fallen from the letters

under Strangfield's angry handling of them.

Scarcely had she replaced the papers in her desk when she heard her father's steps on the stairs. He entered his bedroom, but speedily emerged, being struck, perhaps, to find Jenny's door closed.

He turned the handle sharply, and exclaimed—

“ Ah, you be here, then ! Your mother has gone to look for you. You are well practised in treading softly. Where have you been ? ”

“ I have been to the school-house to seek my husband,” she answered, returning his stern gaze with a look of despairing resolution.

“ And you have not found him ? ”

“ No, father, no ! ” she replied, with a shriek in her voice.

“ If he be your husband, why has he

left you ? ” he said, speaking as a judge might in preface to condemning a man to death.

She shook her head and locked her twitching fingers, no longer meeting his eyes, for the bitterness in them was insupportable.

He approached the bed and leaned heavily upon the frame of it.

“ Woman ! in my heart you are condemned for treachery to me and your mother. Yet I have said to myself, in the words of the Preacher, ‘ Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry ! ’ and now, if you find me so, you shall rebuke me. Jenny, for what you have this day told your mother, I hate my own flesh that you should be a part of it. Yet I will be merciful. You shall prove to me that your sin is not the dishonour of your parents’ name, nor the destruction of your soul in

the eyes of Almighty God. Do you heed me? You shall prove this."

She made no answer.

"Speak!" he cried. "Show me how this may be done."

She looked at him with terrified eyes, for no courage that she had could combat her instinctive fear of him. He waited for her reply.

"Tell me what I am to do, father; indeed I will obey you. I am truly his wife. God, who hears me, knows that I am not speaking falsely. With this ring he wedded me, father."

And with trembling hand she sought in her pocket for her purse.

"Nay, nay, I have no wish to see it. Such a matter signifies nothing. Better tricks than such tokens cannot fool old eyes. Tell me where you were married."

"In London, father."

"Ay, in London. At what church?"

"I do not know the name; it has slipped my memory. Or my husband never mentioned it," she replied, with an expression on her face that should have told her father to press her no further.

"By whom were you married?"

"I did not see—I was frightened. The church was dark, and I did not lift my eyes, and we were but a moment signing our names."

A look of savage incredulity—the scepticism of a man stirred to the most hidden and deadly forces of his nature—shot into his face. He gazed at her for some moments in silence, and then, in a voice that, for the hollowness of it, sounded as though it rose from under his feet, said—

"It is as I before said—you remember nothing. But their wedding is a thing

all women remember; and it is strange you should so soon forget yours, when your mother will tell you everything that befell on her wedding-day, twenty-three years ago. Would you know the church if you saw it?"

"Yes, father, I—I think so—I do not know, father."


"To-morrow you and I will go to London," said he. "Make up a little box of things, for this business may keep us. In the morning, at seven, we start. Be in readiness!"

Without another word he left the room.

She leaned against the wall near the window, and her heavy eyelashes drooped over the sorrowful beauty of her eyes. So standing, and with her graceful profile taking a delicate transparency from the light shining through the window, and the soft fulness of her perfect form ripely

figured on the white ground of paper that supported her, never more lovely had she looked; and the shimmer of her yellow hair was as the trembling of evening sunshine upon water.

Deep grief is always quiescent, and the deepest grief was shrined in this gentle woman. That she was not guiltless only made her sorrow the more moving. She had erred in deceiving father and mother, in privily and without home's blessing undertaking the sacred obligation of marriage. Yet how hardly was she dealt with! how cruel the interpretation of a deed of faithful love! And why had Cuthbert left her? How bitterly hard that any act of *his* should be beyond the skill of her heart to construe! Yet her glorious fidelity could not hold him faithless. All the reasoning of her brain was but a cobweb under the sweeping hand of instinct.



Living or dead, he was her husband, and loved by her as never man deserved ; and that he did not come to her was fate's cruelty only, and for him her heart held no reproach.

In this wise thinking, with an impulsive movement she drew forth her purse and slipped her wedding-ring on ; kissed it wildly, and, with a quick toss of her hands, fell with her face upon the bed, weeping bitterly.

This posture was she in when her mother entered the room. The poor woman ran to her quickly.

“ You have come back, my darling ? Where hast thou been all this long time ? Jenny, do not cry so—my heart will break if you grieve in this way. Has father been saying unkind things to thee, my pretty ? Come, come, it is not all hopeless yet. Truly I believe that Mr. Shaw

is thy husband ; and be sure, be sure he will return, for no man with his beauty is heartless, and he would not have married thee, Jenny, to leave thee in this way ! ”

She raised the girl from the bed and led her to a chair, and, kneeling by her, pillowed her head on her bosom.

“ Oh, mother, is it not too cruel that I should lose my husband and be doubted by father ? To-morrow he means to take me to London to show him the church ; for he will not believe me without dragging me a weary journey. And God knows what I shall do when we reach London, for I do not remember the name of the church, nor the street where it stands, and I have told him I was too scared to take notice. And would not a young girl like me be frightened, mother, in that great place, and acting wrongly, although I was with my darling ? ”

“To-morrow does he take you to London! Oh, what a strange, hard man! Why, all day you will be travelling; and cannot he see that you have no strength!” cried Mrs. Strangfield, rising from her knees; and, with a hot, indignant look, she swept out of the room and went to her husband, whom she found in the act of quitting the house.

“Michael, I must speak to thee. What are you going to do with Jenny? If you break her heart you will kill us both, and that indeed you are doing!” she cried shrilly.

With his hand on the latch of the house door, he stared at her with contemptuous sternness; then with a stride made for the parlour, and closed the door upon them both.

“Jane, subdue your voice, and speak to me respectfully. You are the girl’s

mother, and I will listen to you ; but I am her father, and mine is the name she has blasted. Do you heed that ? It is Michael Strangfield's daughter whom the people are talking about. Remember this, and now say your mind."

"For shame ! for shame ! to speak of her as having blasted your name !" replied Mrs. Strangfield, quite unable to control her voice. "Hath she not told you that Mr. Shaw is her husband ? The wedding-ring is now on her finger—as good a ring as this—and if she be not an honourable wife, then my name is my father's. What ! you would take the poor heart to London, when she declares that in her fright she took no notice of the street and church ! Would not a stout spirit be scared by what she did, with thee, as her father, to terrify her conscience ? Why, myself, when you are hazing me with your

strong voice, lose my head and know not what I am about. And shall our little wench have stronger brains than her mother—at a time, too, which makes the best of women tremble and keep their eyes down in modesty and awe, though their parents are with them and kind friends to give them heart for the journey? For shame, to doubt her! What think you is her sin? Great Lord! that a religious man should have no charity for his only child! Would you break her heart for the sake of your neighbours? Yes, yes! I believe thee wouldst! But what will killing her with cruelty do for thee? It will leave thee a lonesome man, scorned by all good fathers, for that you showed your pretty one no mercy, and denied her love and compassion when her heart was sore, and she had no power to prove her innocence!”

“Understand this!” he shouted with fury, and his eyes in a blaze; “if she says that she knows not the church wherein she was married, nor can show it me, nor the book wherein their names should be written, nor the man that married them, and hath no more evidence than a ring which a crown-piece will buy for any harlot, I’ll know her for what she is—and no tears from her, nor insolence from thee, shall change me!”

She held out her hands in the attitude of one fending off an attack.

“Never could I have believed it of thee, Michael!” she said, in a voice of indescribable reproach, and turned to leave him.

“Stay!” he commanded. “Before you go, give me your reason for opposing me.”


Too insulted by his words about her

child to confront him, she replied, " She has not the strength to travel to London ; and why would you take her there ? She tells thee plainly she will not know the church, though she see it, and its name was never mentioned to her by Mr. Shaw."

" You believe her ! " he said, with deep-toned sarcasm.

" As I believe in the Lord ! " cried the mother, eagerly turning her swimming eyes upon him.

" You shall credit her if you please ; but your faith in her innocence does not purify her. Give me proof of her honesty, and, though I scorn her for her deceit, yet you shall see me use her gently. Am I to stand still under this shame that has come upon me and mine, and make no effort to clear it away, that our light may shine again before men ! She does not



lack strength to seek her husband, and since noon has she been wandering in the heat. Though we had to travel a thousand miles for proof of her honour, would the journey be too long? Let God forgive her for sending me in my old age from my home, to clear her name of foul suspicion—if it can be done! Go now and repeat my words to her, and let her be in readiness to start with me at the hour I named. No more!” he cried, with a stamp of the foot, holding up his hand. “Too much have you already said. Bid her keep to her room, for I’ll not meet her this day.”

And passing his wife, he flung open the door, and left the house.

“The Lord have mercy upon him, and forgive him his sins!” moaned poor Mrs. Strangfield to herself.

Not immediately could she return to

Jenny. She had bargained on controlling her husband, by her appeal, from taking the girl to London; and, being defeated, wanted time to recover her heart to meet the poor child. Her husband's austerity was, indeed, an old knowledge of hers, and his violent prejudices and the inhuman hatred of wrongdoing that shuts the gates of mercy on the fallen. Was it not Dr. Shaw who had described him as one of a class of men who, professing to loathe the emotional pageantries of the Papists, and the smaller displays of the Established Church, were, nevertheless, those who had kept alive, to a period within living memory, the monstrous superstition of witchcraft, and hanged old women on the evidence of crazy wenches—who had made of Dissent a bitter fountain, to drown out of the Christianity of the land all charity; denying to others

the liberty they themselves took, and stretched into trespass ; degrading human nature by a sombre scepticism of human goodness ; and squeezing the large and lovely religion of Christ into a narrow funnel for their own and sole decanting into salvation ?

Mrs. Strangfield had read the printed lecture with such mute remonstrances and ineffectual plungings of wrath, as an honest wife should feel when her husband is heavily dealt with ; but now, as she stood pondering over Michael's cruel theory of his girl and his unfatherly severity, and harsh resolution to purge himself of dishonour in his neighbours' eyes, if he broke Jenny's heart for it, she could not help recalling Dr. Shaw's lecture, and thinking that the school-master had a tolerable idea of what he was speaking about, after all. She heaved

a deep sigh, and wiped her moist forehead. Was religion, she wondered, given to us that we might always carry grave faces, always be quoting Holy Writ, always rebuking mirth; that we should have no forgiveness for sin, and no mercy for error which is not sin, and no tenderness for the child that had stepped out of the hard dry road of life to pluck one of the few flowers that bloom on the wayside, but must not be gathered without our leave? She was a good Christian herself, punctual in her devotions, versed in Holy Scripture, and leading a blameless life; yet sometimes, God forgive her! had she owned to her secret heart, that if she had her time over again she would not marry Michael Strangfield.

Jonathan Grouse the barber, whom Michael called a sinner, and wholly damned, loved his children, nevertheless;

and when his eldest girl Susan was betrayed by a marine, he wept over her and took her to his heart, and spent a month's earnings to hire a coach to drive her to the church, when he got her honestly married.

Well, the Lord forbid that she shouldn't think right, if she thought at all; and if Michael was only a little softer, all would be middling well with her—perhaps. But to think of poor Jenny upstairs — whose only sin was that she had married a gentleman's son slyly,—driven to it by father's hate of Dr. Shaw, which was a most irreligious sentiment to begin with—abused and wrongly suspected, and now to be dragged away to London!

She must have a good cry before she went to her; and cry she did, heartily, thinking all the while of the proud

position she might hold as Cuthbert's mother-in-law—the envy of all tattlers—if Michael would only take things quietly and leave her to manage a bit.

CHAPTER IV.

A BITTER RESOLVE.

“Twin-souled she seemed, a two-fold nature wearing,
Sometimes a flashing falcon in her daring,
Then a poor mateless dove that droops despairing.”

O. W. HOLMES.

NIGHT is the bitterest time for sorrow. Something there always is in the day—in the activity of cloudy sunshine, or the waving of trees, or the going to and fro of men and women, and the sound of their voices—to pluck grief as it were by the sleeve, and compel it from fixed contemplation. But the stillness of night gives subtlety to thought, and quickens

the madness which despair truly is : for what are the stars but funeral lamps in the eyes of the mourner, and each passing wail of wind a voice of the eerie sympathy that cheers not ?

All the evening Jenny had remained in her room, and had but now, at this hour of ten, which was even tolling, said good night to her mother, parting with her after a long and close embrace, and with a prayer that God would bless her for her love. Then did she lock her door, and sit and listen ; and presently heard both father and mother come to their bedroom, and the murmur of their voices.

In those old times there used to be in fashion a little travelling-box, light to carry, with a strap across the lid that the arm might sling it, and much used by country folk ; so that when in London a girl was seen equipped with one of

them, she was immediately set down as a wench from the provinces, and Lysimachus's thoughts fell busy.

One of these boxes stood on the floor, and the packing of it, with many a long halt for a sobbing fit, and active protest and hopeful reassurance, had been Mrs. Strangfield's occupation for a part of the evening. Presently rising, Jenny went to the box and tried its weight. Light enough it was—with a single change of apparel only; yet she took a turn with it about the room (treading on tiptoe), as if to make sure that it was not a burden above her strength.

She was restless, and could not remain quiet. Now she would draw out her purse and count the money that it held; now she would approach the glass and gaze at the spectral, mournful beauty of her white face; anon, and with no more sound

than a mouse creeping, she would pace the room ; until the fever in her waned, and the passionate spurring of thought ceased to lacerate and drive. Whereupon she extinguished the light, and took a place at the window, and surrendered herself to contemplation of the stars.

Manifestly she meant to take no rest that night, or was very long in going to it. Her window overlooked the High Street and the dark shadow of the market-place. The moon was crawling out of the sea at the back, and casting its sickly yellow film upon the highest points of the cliff, and the oil-lamps of the town burned steadily up the slope, till the abrupt gloom of unlighted houses and the land about was a space of black between them and the stars.

Perfect stillness there never is at the seaside ; there is always moaning on the

beach, and a delicate seething among the motionless folds of the air. Yet there was very nearly a perfect stillness now : no tramp of foot in the street, no distant rattle of wheel on country road. In those old times, Greystone went to bed early, and, like a man without care, fell asleep at once.

One would have had no need for sharp eyes, to look at Jenny's face and know her as a girl on the eve of some wild business. To-morrow morning was she to be carried a long and sorrowful journey by her father ; and when in London, from church to church they were to wander ; and all the while her heart was to burn in the fire of his wrath, and her sacred purity to be blackened by his thoughts of it. A whole week, and more days yet, might pass in the search, and every disappointment would be an extra weight to

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strain the tension that must end in breaking her heart. Her ignorance of matters which, had she but foreseen all this, would have been easy to learn and remember, was so deep, that even her mother had groaned over her that evening. The very neighbourhood wherein Cuthbert had hired lodgings during his holiday in London she did not know; she had never had occasion to write to him. He had come to Sydenham and met her by an appointment planned before they left Greystone; and all their arrangements were verbally concerted, with never a hitch of weather to disappoint them, and that was why no letters had passed.

So, then, the London parish in whose church they were united was unknown to her. No light could she give, beyond taking God's holy name in witness that

she spoke the truth, which only her mother believed.

But the uselessness of the journey, and the fear of her father's anger if failure should attend their search, were not the first causes of her present resolution. Pride wounded to death, an exquisite sensibility torn and bleeding, a high and noble innocence scarlet under contumely, and mad to veil its injuries in a place where she should be unknown ; the trembling womanly fear of the poisoned tongue of gossip, and the despairing sense that the home in which she was born could not contain her whilst her father's frown condemned her as a criminal, and his bitter face showed him poisoned by the moral atmosphere which he mercilessly believed she exhaled around—these were the main determining influences.

That night, she resolved, would be the

last she should ever pass in the old wooden house. Call her mad if you please—and few such desperate resolves but have madness at bottom; but there was courage too, a virtuous audacity, and of a most womanly sort, acting without reflection; that is, influenced by the present that was driving her, and taking no thought of the future upon which she was rushing.

The church clock was striking the half-hour after eleven, when with a shiver she rose from her chair at the open window, and, stealing to the bedroom door, opened it noiselessly, and listened. The deep breathing in the adjacent apartment where her parents lay, the fall of an ember in the kitchen grate, the loud ticking of a clock, were the only sounds audible.

Leaving the door ajar, she put on her

hat, to which a veil was attached, threw a shawl over her shoulders, and raised the little trunk. There was clear moonlight abroad now, and light enough reflected to give distinctness to all objects in the room. On tiptoe she descended the staircase, and, the better to make her exit soundless, went through the kitchen. There was moonlight shining through the dusty scullery window, and an old cat lying on the kitchen table mewed tremulously as she passed. This plaintive cry, rising out of the dead silence, smote her nerves wildly. With shuddering fingers she touched the animal's head, and then could she have broken forth into wild weeping. In a few moments she had lightly drawn the bolts of the back door, and stood in the moonlight.


The night was soft and sweet with dew, and the mild stars shone lustrously. Now was it that the cool air, and the

deserted length of the High Street, and the black shadows of the soaring town, brought to her an unutterable sense of homelessness, and the chill and terror of the lonesome state. She came round to the front of the house and under the gloom of the bay tree, paused and reflected, not daring to lift her eye to her parents' bedroom window.

A rough programme of her actions had she formed, and when in her room had felt she had endurance enough to compass it fully. But the long and lonely night-walk meditated seemed now beyond her strength, although she was sustained by a wonderful spirit, and, in the heat of the fever in her blood, and the despairing passion of dread which the shame and horror of her father's suspicion had excited, was capable of effort that should seem independent of mere physical force.

Suddenly she heard the tramp of a man's heavy step, and the figure of one of the four watchmen who guarded the little town (chiefly in armchairs, and asleep over tobacco-pipes), holding a lantern which flitted in his grasp and illuminated his long grey coat and the folds of his cap, stalked solemnly out of the shadow of the market-place through the moonlight in the High Street, and passed away, raising a melancholy cry in his passago for the edification of all listening night-caps.

She crept softly out of the darkness, and crossed the road and went up the street, hugging the shadow of the houses. When abreast of the market-place, again was she seized with a numbing sense of helplessness, and a great agony of spirit. The sympathy of a human voice—some one to tell her story to and take advice



from, she wanted ; and, perhaps, the very last person whom it would have entered her head to apply to under any other circumstances, she now resolved to seek.

This was Mrs. Mead, who had shown her some kindness that morning, and the sort of sympathy that was not likely to thwart if it did not profit her.

So she flitted like some restless spirit through empty stalls and vacant, silent gloom, and hesitating a moment before Mrs. Mead's door, knocked lightly.

Although there was no light in Mrs. Mead's window, the old woman was not asleep, having not two minutes before Jenny's arrival extinguished her tallow candle and got into bed. The truth was, that at nine o'clock that evening had come Mrs. Basings, her niece, moaning over her husband's loss ; and, to comfort her, Mrs. Mead had gone to the expense

of a half-pint of gin, over which the two ladies had sat until after eleven. Hearing a sound that resembled a knock on the door, the old woman lifted her ear out of the pillow and listened, questioning whether it was Mrs. Basings who had returned or the tailor overhead, who had an evil trick of pacing his room when he should be asleep. After a little interval the knock was repeated, and there being no mistake about the noise this time, Mrs. Mead, greatly wondering, darted her withered legs out of bed, struck a light, swathed her old form in the counterpane, which she plucked from the bed, went to the door and opened it, holding the candle over her head.

To an eye unprepared for such a spectacle, a more terrifying object of ugliness than this old woman could scarcely have presented itself; the coverlid gave her the

look of a corpse in a winding-sheet, and the twisting shadows thrown upon her face by the flare of the candle-flame in the draught of the narrow passage struck a most unearthly vitality into her features.

She instantly recognized Jenny, and uttered a cry of astonishment.

“Michael Strangfield’s girl! At this time o’ night! Seekin’ of me, too! Lord, Lord! what is the matter?”

“Let me come in and speak to you, Mrs. Mead,” said the girl in a hollow whisper. “I am leaving father and mother for good, but have no strength to walk all the way to Winston without a living voice to give me a word of comfort and advise me.”

“To Winston! This time o’ night! But come in, come in!” cried the old woman, lowering her voice with involuntary relish of this new mystery that had come to her

very door, and looking backwards at the staircase to make sure the tailor was not listening. And, in her hospitable and inquisitive eagerness, she put out her hand to draw Jenny by the arm, whereby she let go of the coverlid and down it tumbled on the floor, and left the old thing staring like Philosopher Square in Molly's attic.

But this was a mishap easily remedied. She was soon decent again, and promptly closed the door.

"Leaving father and mother for good!" said she, leading Jenny to a chair, and pushing the candle close to her that she might see her face. "Whatever are you doing that for?"

"Because father suspects me of speaking falsely," answered Jenny; "and I cannot bide with him to be thought sinful, and spurned at by the people."

“And for that you are leaving home!” exclaimed the old woman, who showed no symptom of sleepiness. “And you are going to Winston? What to do there, Miss Jenny?”

“My cousin, Bridget Lloyd, lives at Marples; and the coach passes Winston at eight in the morning. To Marples I am going, to ask Bridget to give me shelter until I can find my living.”

“Well, indeed! And do ye mean to walk five mile to-night? Why, ye says t’ coach doth not pass before eight, and where will ye stay till it comes?”

“I have not thought,” answered Jenny with a heavy sigh. “But I will not stop in Greystone to be mocked. Oh, Mrs. Mead! to-morrow morning father would take me to London to show him the church where I was married, and this

I cannot do. What then will he think? But it is not only because I cannot prove myself my dearest one's wife that I am leaving home. Because father thinks me a wicked sinner and a liar I am running away, and because all the town who have not a father's heart for me will think worse things of Jenny. Oh, may God lend me wisdom to know the right thing to do, and forgive me the sorrow I this night cause my mother!"

She bit her lip cruelly to restrain her tears, for she feared the sight of them would move Mrs. Mead to hinder her desperate resolution.

"Before you move a step, or say another word, ye shall have something to mend your spirits with," said the old woman, briskly, and entered her bedroom, whence in a few moments she returned, with a gown and shawl on, and, going

to a cupboard, produced a little flask of cherry cordial, of which she obliged Jenny to swallow a glassful.

“It is a strange thing for you to do,” said she, resuming her chair, and twisting her scant grey tresses into a knot at the back of her head. “Doth your cousin, Mrs. Lloyd, know you are coming to her?”

“No,” Jenny answered. “I did not make up my mind to leave home till father told me to get ready to quit for London with him in the morning. I should fear to be with him if we could not find the church. If he does not think me truthful, then I am a sinner to him, and not fit for his house; and that is why I am leaving him for ever!”


Her eyes flashed as she spoke, and the hard look of her mouth might have reminded Mrs. Mead of the deacon at his

sternest. But the anger melted away, and she cried piteously, "You will tell my poor mother that you have seen me, and why I have left her? Father's harshness to me is breaking her heart, and what will she do when she finds her pretty one gone?" and she paused again to battle with her tears.

"Miss Jenny, if ye are wise, ye'll go home," said Mrs. Mead, nodding her head. "Why, what'll folks say, when it's known you've roon away? Sure enough they'll call ye a guilty wench, and you would not like that."

"They will call me that if I stay—why should they not, if father thinks it?—and never could I go into the street, nor meet human eyes, with this shame upon me!" she cried, despairingly.

"It's hard to know! it's hard to know!" groaned the old woman. "Would



ye wish your mother to hear where you are?"

"No!" she answered quickly. "So that I am living and with friends, as you must tell her, Mrs. Mead, she will not despair. But no one must be told where I am—no one, Mrs. Mead. Promise me that! Swear it!"

"I'll swear it if you please, Mrs. Jenny," replied Mrs. Mead, sympathetically giving the girl her wifely prefix. "But before ye make me take an oath, just think awhile. If I swear, they may drown me and not get the truth. Suppose Mr. Cuthbert——"

"Ah!" exclaimed the girl, with a short, passionate cry, "if *he* should come—why, why, Mrs. Mead, you would tell him *instantly*; he would be eager and mad to find me, and I to be with him. O heavenly Lord! if Thou wouldst but

give him to me now!" she cried, raising her clasped hands, whilst her voice died away into a soft, exquisitely musical plaintive note.

"I don't like this business—truly, I would rather have no hand in it," said Mrs. Mead, slowly turning her face from side to side. "Thy father would come and burn my house down if he knew I had helped you to leave the town."

"You need not help me. I will go away now, Mrs. Mead, and leave you to your rest."

"That you shall not!" cried the old woman, jumping up and laying her skinny hand on Jenny, who had risen. "Sit down, sit down, my pretty. Why, how long will it take ye to walk to Winston? Two hours, will it? And so you shall come to the village at three i' the morn, and have five hours to count the daisies

in afore th' coach comes! Sit down! sit down! Ye'll not leave this house yet a bit, I'se warrant!"

"But I will be on my way before the light comes and the people are up," answered Jenny, still standing.

"So ye shall, but not afore the light comes. Sit, mistress. Lord save your heart, 'tis easier nor standing, and I for one niver can think on my feet. No-wheers like bed for thinkin', say I, and then ye're flat. Ye'll be changing your mind, I doubt, if ye'll sit and ponder."

"Do not say that, Mrs. Mead. I have already left home, and it is as bad as if I were a thousand miles off. I will not go back, indeed. Bid me good night, and be sure my heart is warm to thee for thy kindness."

"Ah!" cried Mrs. Mead, forcing her, but not untenderly, into her chair, "ye

come from an obstinate father, and arguments, as I've always said, is wasted on sitch. If ye mean to go, I'll not stop you—and who should know best but you? But the job needn't be worse nor it is. I'm one," said she, going to her cupboard, "as loves crature comforts. Crature comforts," she continued, producing a couple of cups and saucers, a loaf of bread, some eggs, and a strange-looking vessel of tin in which was some tea, made precious by the price of it in those days, "is a true voice of consolation to the afflicted, to my way o' thinking. Niver did I attend a buryin', or go a-nursin', or help to lay a body out, but first I laid in a meal o' food. Niver doth the mind do duty on an empty stomach. If it's but a crust o' hard bread and a spoonful o' gin, let me have it, I says, before I go to work. There's no sperrit in fasting."

And so she rattled on, in a subdued voice for fear of disturbing the tailor and his wife overhead, all the while kindling a fire, and preparing the table, and ceasing her gabble only to go and draw a kettle of water from some back place.

Jenny watched her with heavy, dreamy eyes. There was no desire for sleep in her, no feeling of weariness, no pang of abstinence, though but little food had passed her lips since the day before. An unnatural excitement sustained her, and rending emotions of pride and despair, which would have made the softest bed that ever a queen slept in a couch of iron and pain to her irritable nerves. If ever suspicion of her error in quitting home fugitively, under a burden of dreadful doubt of her purity, flitted across her mind, she knew that the step she had taken made her impulse irremediable.

With stolidity pitiful to behold in lovely eyes, and a face hard with misery, gleaming marble-like in the poor rays of the candle, she watched Mrs. Mead as she pursued her hospitable labours, listening to her quaint discourse with an inattention which was often abruptly illustrated by sudden glances at the window, upon which the night still lay black.

There was a despatch in the old woman's method of going to work, and a quiet, too, were it not for the subdued, eternal cackle of her tongue, that would have made a sick man love her. She produced another candle and brightened up the room, and presently the kettle was blowing out its filament of steam.

"Now, mistress," said she, "here be a dish of tea which all Chaney, where the herb grows, as I've heerd, couldn't match. Just a shred of bread, with this fine new

butter, 'll give that egg a relish as ye'll niver cease to remember. Come, come! sin' we mun both keep awake, there's naught like tea—or tay, as my mother used to call it; and that's the right word, though in these queer times a body hath no liberty. Well, will ye not laugh over this feast some day? I reckon Mr. Shaw 'll make ye see a joke in it, for I niver knew a blue eye like his that didn't mean a merry heart; and this will I say of your husband, mistress, that since the days when poor Will Hacket coorted me i' silk stockings, I've niver seen a prettier lad than Mr. Cuthbert Shaw. Crack the egg, my dear, an' if ye shall tell the inside of it from cream, I'll swallow the shell. It's middling late for supper; but as thy father once said to me fifteen year ago, when I loved a bit o' riband as has no relish now, we're all artificial cra-

tures—which is the Lord's truth. Why shouldn't a body eat i' the middle o' the night as well as the morn? Come, come, make a beginning, or I'll not go along wi' ye."

"But I do not want you to come along with me, Mrs. Mead. Indeed, I should not allow you to leave your house after keeping you from your bed—no, truly; though I love you dearly for your kindness," exclaimed Jenny.

"Do you think I should let a pretty young woman walk alone to Winston at this time o' morn, with her box and her sweet face to court ivery smock she may come across?" cried Mrs. Mead, poising a saucer on a level with her nose, and straining her eyes at Jenny over it. "What is a summer's morning walk to me? If I can't hinder thee from leaving home, I'll see thee safe in t' coach, any-

ways, and that'll be something for me to tell thy mother."

The need of companionship was strong in Jenny. All the way to Winston, with a long waiting for the coach, was a weary undertaking, and what society should she have but bitter thoughts? Besides, a little touch of comfort there was in the feeling that her mother would know that no harm had befallen her, if Mrs. Mead gave the story so far as her promise of secrecy permitted. But there was that in the old woman's face which helped Jenny to prompt acceptance of the offer than otherwise her sweetness would have sanctioned. Mrs. Mead was clearly determined, and ready to quarrel, that her will should have its way. So the lonely-hearted girl, with the saddest smile on her white face, went up to the dame and thanked her with a kiss upon the ripples

of her forehead ; and had she been a man, a favour more delightful the old woman could not have made it seem. But oh, what a contrast when the faces were together !

Now slowly, as they sat in these small hours—outside, the solemn stillness of the night, and within, no sound but the humming of the kettle to thread the melodious complaining notes of the girl and the creaking tones of her sympathetic listener—the faint and mystical light of the new day, creeping from the infinite abyss into the towering chambers of the western heavens, stood palely on the window-glass, and little twitter of birds broke abruptly from invisible places.

Until the light had broadened, Mrs. Mead refused to heed it; and Jenny, with her back to the window, and telling the long story of her love and marriage and

sorrow to her companion, did not see it. Then the girl pausing with feverish eyes, after words of bitter wonder that Cuthbert should have left her, and a wild cry that he might not be dead, Mrs. Mead held up her finger.

“Mistress,” said she, “before it is too late, think well of what you are about to do. Hush ! If ye were my own child I should not say more to thee.”

“I have thought ! I have thought !” moaned Jenny, rocking herself to and fro. “My cousin Bridget will give me a home ; and she and her husband only shall know my story. But what will the talk be here, whether I stay or go ? Never could I stir abroad, and at home my father could not bear to look at me. Should God send my husband back, then father will hang his head to think of the wrong he has done his girl. And thou shalt tell

mother where I am. But, until Cuthbert comes, I will keep hidden. I have sworn it to myself; and if I should be forced to stay here, I would kill myself—indeed I would!”

“Well, truly!” muttered the old woman. “To see your beauty, like a kitten’s, and such soft smiles as ye greet with, who’d think ye had so much spirit? I don’t say ye aren’t right. You’re taching some folks a lesson as ’ll profit ’em; and when you’re righted, the people here ’ll make a queen of ye—see, now! Doth not the Lord say, ‘It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs’? Yet his own child’s bread hath your father taken, and niver are dogs wanting when there is a crust to gnaw. Turn your head now, my pretty. Do ye see it’s day?”

With a sharp glance at the window, Jenny jumped from her chair.

“I must go quickly,” she cried. “There will be people abroad, and if I am seen they will run to father.”

“There’ll be no one abroad for another hour yet—not aven the market-folk,” replied Mrs. Mead. “But I’ll not keep ye scared.”

She fetched her shawl and bonnet from the bedroom, and whilst she put them on she said—

“There’s Sally Walker, as kapes the Greyhound at Winston. I nursed her mother, and was at her funeral; and niver doth Sal come to Greystone without droppin’ in to see if Mother Mead be still alive. We’ll have her up, mistress, though she be snoring, and she shall give thee a couch for two hours’ rest. For d’ye think you’re made o’ wire and parchement like me, that you can sit through a whole night without a nap? At seven

there'll be summat to break thy fast wi',
I'se warrant—if I kill one o' Sally's pigs
myself, for the daintiness o' chitterlings.
Then unto the coach ye'll get, and may
the Lord send ye happiness ! ”

So saying, she laid hold of Jenny's box,
and with muffled tread, and without
speech, they both of them went into the
grey morning light.

CHAPTER V.

THE EMPTY BEDROOM.

"In marriage blessynges are botte fewe, I trowe."

Chatterton.

A LITTLE before six in the morning a ray of bright warm sunshine, like a golden wand projected from the window, having crept gradually along the wall, smote Mr. Strangfield between the eyes as he lay asleep in his bed, and awoke him.

Looking upon his watch, which hung at the side of the bed, he rose, without disturbing his wife from the deep sleep into which she had fallen scarce an hour

before, after long and weary wakefulness. The weight on his heart and the languor in his limbs he knew how to account for by remembering what had happened yesterday, and what he had felt; but never before this morning had old age, or rather the serenity that comes before the branch lies naked against the sky, made itself so sensibly apprehensible as an influence of weariness.

Not without pity which, even, should not find the lines of stubbornness repellant, would one have beheld the worn, handsome face: there was an ashen grey-ness over it that developed the care and the pain and the age, as the photographer's chemical calls forth the picture on the plate; the white in his hair looked plentiful, and the bristles on his chin were white, and the lustre of his eyes faint. One might have said that he had

aged ten years since the morning before ; but then, to be sure, men who are growing grey never look greyer than when they leave their beds.

He had almost finished dressing himself when his wife awoke, and, after the first bewilderment, asked him the time.

“There is an hour before the coach starts,” he said. “See about getting the breakfast ready. I shall be in the yard until the half-hour ; and get you to Jenny, that she may not keep me waiting.”

Saying which he left the room, wearing his yesterday's bitter face, which had come to him with the first words of his wife.

No sooner was he gone than Mrs. Strangfield quitted her bed, and went to the door to call Jenny. The room used

by the girl was to the right of the room occupied by the husband and wife; the door of it stood open, and that was something to wonder at if Jenny were not downstairs. Into the room walked the mother, and all she saw was a bed that had never been slept in.

Now for some moments this was a sight with a significance not to be realized.

She went to the bedside and stared at it, and then round her, with a slow slipping of her head on her neck, like a ball on a pivot. Presently on the bed again she fixed her eyes, with all the blankness of the frost-white counterpane reflected in them.

“What trick is she playing me?” she cried to herself, but in a clear, strong voice. “Jenny!”

And all about the room she went, probing and peering like a faithful dog

sniffing for its hidden young. Until it came into her head that her child had run away; on which she fled from the room with a shriek.

That shriek brought forth the trollop Polly, who beheld her mistress clinging to the top rail of the banister, motioning with her hand.

“Lor, missus, what is it? For mussy’s sake, mum, don’t look so scarifying, mum! Oh, missus, what ha’ yees seen?”

“Tell your master to come to me,” exclaimed Mrs. Strangfield, in a choking voice, and she went reeling into her bedroom, and sank upon a chair. But up again she must jump in a moment, and run into Jenny’s room, and in the centre of it she stood looking around her with rolling eyes. She was too frightened for deliberate search—even a direct clue she would not have heeded. With both hands

pressed upon her heart she stood. Was it that the sorrowful girl, mourning her cruel bereavement, and the dishonour done her by her father, and dreading the journey, and the object of the journey that morning, had not chosen to rest; that all night long she had kept her vigil, and now was gone forth to cool her burning eyes against the soft wind blowing from the sea? Was it so? Ah, pray God! And the mother, with moving lips, drew to the window, and sent her startled gaze over the summer scene of swelling cliff, and folds of houses standing with shine of gold under the meek sweetness of the morning blue.

Mr. Strangfield came upstairs, and from the landing called to her. She ran to him, crying, "Michael, see here! Our child hath not slept in her bed! Where is she, do you think? Oh, if you love

your wife, run to your men and bid them seek her. For God's sake do this, Michael, —*now!* ”

He went past her without answer and entered Jenny's room. If amazement or pain were in him, it was veiled by a heavy frown.

“ Silence ! ” he cried, as his wife began to speak. “ Before we judge her, let us know what she has done. It is no sign that she has run away from us because she has not slept in her bed. Has she not acted more crazily than to stay awake in her clothes all night ? Look about you and tell me what things you find missing.”


“ Nothing, Michael. Oh, my heart, yes ! Where be the little trunk I packed for her last night ? ”

With wonderful quickness she flung open the door of a closet, and then

searched beneath the bed. Next she uttered a sharp cry, and leaned against her husband. He led her not untenderly to her room, but his own steps were weak and shaky, and his face as white as a dying man's, which made his frown a black shadow upon his forehead.

"We must have patience yet," he exclaimed, drawing forth his watch, and speaking with his eyes bent down upon it. "She knows at what hour the coach starts, and if she be not guilty she will be here. Get thyself dressed, and let the breakfast be ready by the half-hour. She may return, and then what will it be that her box is gone? Bear up, for in half an hour great changes come. I will wait for thee and her in the parlour."

He went slowly and painfully downstairs, and stood at the window whispering to himself, which was a strange trick



for an obstinate, hard-headed man to fall into on a sudden.

In a short while Mrs. Strangfield came from her room, and stood at the doorway watching him in silence. She sighed heavily; but as though he heard neither her step nor her sigh, he did not turn his head; and with a fear of his stern, unbending silence on her, she went away to the kitchen to help Polly to get breakfast ready.

"Polly," she whispered, "didst thee see Miss Jenny leave the house this morning?"

"I? No, indeed, missus! Be she gone, then?" said the girl, with her hair all feathery for lack of brushing, and the end of her nose black from frequent strokes of her bare arm.

"Hush, silly wench! Why do you shout? She hath not slept in her bed,

Polly. Oh, God ! if she be run away from me ! ”

“ Roon away ! Why, missus ! wha'tiver would she be doin' that for ? ” said the slut, craning her neck out of the collarless rim of her frock.

“ Stir the fire, that the eggs may boil. Never do you talk but that you stop your work. Cannot you use your hands and tongue together ? Hold your prate ! As sure as thy nose is as black as thy master's boot, I'll be packing thee to thy mother for a slovenly fool ! ” cried Mrs. Strangfield, in that phase of grief which admits of easy supervision of irritation.

The time was passing quickly. It was five minutes after the half-hour when breakfast was put upon the table, and Mr. Strangfield drew a chair for himself, and began to eat with the gesture of a man who forces himself to do something

he abhors. Not a mouthful could the mother swallow; her gaze was for ever upon the open window, and her ears pricking for every little sound.

But expectation was wrought by fear into insupportable pain at last, and unable to endure the hard silence, she cried out—

“Michael, she doth not come!”

He looked at her vacantly, aroused by her speech out of deep thought, and pulled out his watch. He rose from his chair instantly, his whole manner changed, and he exclaimed—

“It is too late for the coach. Now what do you say to your girl’s honesty?”

Under the crushing bitterness of the tone in which these words were delivered, and the dangerous passion which his smouldering eyes showed to be burning in the heart of his iron will, Mrs. Strangfield sat for a space motionless. Her

husband's personal challenge of shame and stubborn wrath, and the remorseless severity of his ashen face, took her for the moment from thoughts of the girl whose chair was vacant. But it is the Lord's will that in a woman's heart the mother should always triumph over the wife; and on a sudden her manner changed from rigidity, and the stupefaction of fear, to eager agitation—to a restless working of mouth and eye, to a wild hurry of emotion over her face.

“Oh, Michael!” she cried, “where do you think our child is? Why should she not be here? Did you say anything to her yesterday to scare her? Last night she kissed me sweetly, and thanked me for my love, and she would not break my heart by leaving me! Oh, Michael, what didst thee say to her?”

“I said no more than bid her be ready

for the coach at eight o'clock this morning," he said, speaking with difficulty through the tension of his lips. "What is there to fright you in this? Could you not have guessed that if she had sinned she would not go with me to London? Would she rush upon her own conviction, silly woman?" He added, in a faint voice: "What heavier blow than this could come upon a man? I would sooner see her dead. And after all these years—in this little town where we are honoured—how will some people scoff to hear that pious Michael Strangfield's girl——"

"I'll not hear thee say it!" shrieked the mother, raising her hands to her ears. "Michael, will you not go and seek her? Shall we stand here wickedly raging at the poor heart that hath been driven from our love by our sorrow and your anger, when every moment is taking her further from

us? Oh, husband, think of our pretty one—so tender, so gentle, Michael—sitting wearied by the wayside, weeping and calling upon death, and thinking there be naught to love her but the gracious Lord who is in the sky! Dost thee not see her? If she had gone twenty miles I would walk to her! I would—I would!”

In a paroxysm of grief and love she ran towards the door. But her husband came after her hastily, and his hand fell upon her shoulder.

“Where would you go?” he said.

“To find my child. Michael, let me be. I will not be hindered!”

He drew her back from the door and closed it violently.

“Listen to reason, woman!” he exclaimed, controlling his voice with an effort that discoloured and convulsed his features. “You run mad easily, and

madness is on you now, and in this temper you are not to be trusted abroad. What will your sorrow do but publish our shame? At thy time of life to chase a phantom! Such is your child now; for where is she gone, and what road will you take? Oh, fool! to let love blind thee to the curse that God has set upon our foreheads! You have suckled vice, and I have loved it and caressed it, and now it has brought shame upon us and left us! The will of the Lord of Hosts be done! But this is my death, Jane—— Wife, this thing has put ice in my heart—I am cold here.”

He stopped short, with his hand upon his breast, shaking his head slowly, with his frown gone.

“ Sit thee down, Michael. My poor man! This is cruel hard upon us both! What have we done that God should

take our only one from us? Sit thee down. Why do you pluck at your shirt?—your hand is all of a shiver.”

She pushed a chair under him and he sank into it, and faintly beat with his fingers upon his thigh, looking downwards with a sideways droop of the head.

He rallied presently, and gazed at her wistfully with a softened eye, as she stood before him with averted face silently crying.

“Am not I wise, Jane, to restrain thee from running into the town to seek the girl? ‘That which is crooked,’ saith the Preacher, ‘cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.’ If she come not back of her own accord, is it meet that her mother should bring her? Not with my leave shall you do it. And if she come, I go! for this house will not hold us two. Hush! I’ll

not hear you. Your love is a mother's, and I say, God help thee ! but if she were twenty times my child, the hem of her garment should not touch the sole of my boot, so hateful hath her sin made her in my sight."

He spoke with subdued energy—as a man in an illness might, indeed ; and though bitter and shocking as his words were for his wife to hear, yet his broken aspect, his ashen face, his drooping head, the senile twitching of his fingers, the dulled gleam in his eye, were sights of pathos to modify pure maternal anguish with wifely yearning and a dim dread not yet definable.

"You will not think her honest !" she moaned. "You will not believe that fear has driven her forth. If she is ignorant of the church wherein she was married, and hath no memory to help thee to find

it, would she not think with terror on the journey and fly rather than take it with you who are so stern to her? Oh, Michael, it drives me mad to stand here and think of her as a lonely, helpless wanderer."

"Why do you say that? Has the man no friends, or means, to give her shelter? How know you that her flight is not a scheme to join her lover who is in hiding? Does she lack cunning? Do not seek her! I would lock thee in thy bedroom rather than that this last disgrace should come upon us!"

She answered him not a word, but leaned her forehead against the edge of the high mantelpiece, and thus stood in silent anguish.

CHAPTER VI.

PROOF POSITIVE.

"If I meant anything now let me die ;
I'm blunt, and cannot fawn and cant, not I,
Like that old Presbyterian rascal, sly :
I am, you know, a right true-hearted Tory."

JENYNS.

Down the familiar road which we have traversed before in our visits to Greystone School, there was coming at this hour, and walking with brisk steps, which ever and anon shot up a twirl of dust, no less a personage than Dr. Isaac Shaw. With brisk steps he was coming ; yet he was a man on whom dignity sate as a habit, and never could he bestir himself to a degree

that should deform the ramrod erectness of his mien, and impair the pompous amplitude of his reedy frill.

This was an uncommonly early hour for Dr. Shaw to be found outside his school; for here was not a man to be courted from discipline by the sweetness of early morning air. Once, hearing the chime of a church clock, he stopped to uproot his watch from the band of his breeches; and then he went forward again, with a well-mannered whirl of a silk pocket-handkerchief over his face, and a tender drag at his back hair.

As he approached the bottom of the hill and neared the houses, his step slackened and took yet a more dignified moderation of gesture. A woman on the other side of the street dropped him a humble curtsy, which he acknowledged with a salutation of such largeness and

elegance as placed the superiority of his breeding above all doubt. The big signet-ring glittered on the finger of his right hand, and in the suave and cleanly circumference of his face scarcely a hint was visible that he carried a real trouble in his heart, and was bent on one of the most distressing missions which fate could have forced his pride upon.

When at the bottom of the street, he paused a moment to inspect the wooden house of the shipwright, which looked shyly towards him through its green drapery.

The glorious expanse of lustrous sea was a background to make a lively picture of the building.

In the yard men were busily hammering at the growing frames of the vessels building.

To the right the grey beach sloped

into the white lip of the water, and sweet smells of resinous wood, the dust of pine, and shavings of the homely elm, were blown softly upon the doctor's nostrils in the salt wind coming lightly from the sea.

With an uneasy glance around him, such as a man might cast who wishes to effect an object without detection, the doctor crossed the road and knocked hurriedly on the door of the wooden house.

There are many kinds of bad servant; but the worst kind of servant is the servant who keeps you waiting on the door-step.

Had this door flown open under the doctor's hand, uplifted to catch the knocker, still something of promptitude would have been missing. For nothing was plainer than that Dr. Shaw had

no wish to be seen standing on that threshold.

At last came Polly, and saluted him with a dirty stare.

“Does Mr. Strangfield live here?” asked Dr. Shaw, holding that it would be a little *too* condescending for a man of his dignity and station to appear to know so humble a fact.

“What do ’ee say?” cried Polly.

The doctor repeated his question in a loud, imperious manner.

“Ay, do he!” replied Polly, evidently astounded at his ignorance. “Are ye in want of him?”

“I wish to see him; show me in,” exclaimed the little man, with a frown.

The girl made way for him to pass, and for love of his frill gave him a wide passage; closed the door with turgid attention to the catch of the latch, and left

the doctor planted against the wall, to escape all touch of her, whilst she went to announce him.

Mrs. Strangfield came hurrying out, with a wild look of sorrow in her face, and her eyes sore with weeping.

But at sight of the fine frill, and haughty mouth, and twisted forehead, and silk waistcoat, God bless her! she curtsied to the ground.

Salaaming was a great business in primitive days, and thought highly of.

Sir Peter Macsycophant made his way through life by bowing, as he admitted to his nephew.

Every boy was taught to make a leg, and do it properly.

Mrs. Strangfield's curtsey made Dr. Shaw a pliable thing.

"I have the pleasure, madam, of addressing——?" And the doctor made

a bow that twisted his figure into a note of interrogation.

“My name is Mrs. Strangfield, sir. I know you to be Dr. Shaw, and may God send you have come to bring us tidings of our girl!” replied the poor mother, in her tearfullest voice.

“I am here on a very special errand—one that concerns us all closely. If your husband is visible I should be glad to see him.”

“Oh yes, sir, he is in this room; pray walk in, Dr. Shaw,” said Mrs. Strangfield, wondering that her tearful face should provoke no expression of concern from the doctor, and herein exactly showing herself to be her daughter’s mother; for on the very previous day had not Jenny herself fallen into the same wonder over the little man’s glazed manners?

He followed her into the parlour, and

within a pace of the door stood to deliver his cool, collected bow to Mr. Strangfield, who half rose from his armchair to return the salutation.

“Good morning to you, Dr. Shaw. Pray take a chair, sir. This fine weather is very promising for the farmers, and there be talk of a grand harvest this year,” said the shipwright, remaining half risen out of his chair until the doctor was seated.

Mrs. Strangfield looked at her husband with an expression of helpless, eager despair. How could he talk of the weather; how could he receive the doctor’s visit so easily! Why did not he ask him at once his object in calling? Great Lord! how did he know but that the schoolmaster was come with shocking news of Jenny? Bolt upright she sat, with her hands tightly clasped.

"I am out betimes this morning," said Dr. Shaw, with a short glance around the homely room. "But then, Mr. Strangfield, from your occupation I naturally conceived you an early riser, and my duty would not permit me to delay my visit."

"Had you come two hours ago you would have found me risen," replied Strangfield, who had gathered his forces together for this unexpected interview, and was now again wearing his hard face and speaking in his stern, deep tones.

Indeed, it must be said that the deacon's antipathy to the doctor was like the smear of a branding-iron on the withers of a weary horse. The pride of both of them, and their common dislike, were better than a film over the eye of their minds to prevent a clear sight of each other's thoughts. Not for worlds would the doctor let the Baptist deacon

know that deep trouble was in him ; not for worlds would the Baptist deacon let the doctor know that a breaking heart beat in his breast.

So, with demeanours to ensure reciprocal repulsion, they fell to their talk, without heed of the mother's desolate, pale face, and the anguish of expectation in her eyes.

"I am here, Mr. Strangfield, in compliance with my promise to give you all news at the earliest opportunity that should enable you—to use your own words—to sift this business of your daughter to the bottom," began the doctor, pulling out his snuff-box for no other motive than to toy with it. "Strange things come to pass in this world, which truly is much smaller than we can get to conceive it by estimate of geographical mensuration ; and I appre-

hend," said he, with his suave smile, "that our respected neighbours will be not a little surprised to hear of visits exchanged between Dr. Shaw and Mr. Strangfield, whose strong objections to the schoolmaster's theological opinions are tolerably well known."

Strangfield looked at him keenly under his frowning eyebrows, and appeared about to speak, but dismissed his thoughts with a wave of the hand, and sank back silent.

"Oh, Dr. Shaw!" cried the mother, incapable of holding her tongue, however awed by the cold fencing between the men, "I wish that difference of religious notions was all the trouble 'twixt you and Michael, sir. Your name hath a sorrowful sound in it to my ears, God knows; and this morning hath made it more bitter than my heart well knows how to bear."

And she hung her pale face to hide her tears.

“Jane!” exclaimed her husband, sternly, “there is no need for thee to put in. Dr. Shaw is here to give us some news; we can await his leisure. Keep thy tongue quiet. It’s a sign of a light head to fret over the past. Whom to upbraid we know; but Dr. Shaw hath no hand in our grief.”

“Madam,” said the doctor, haughtily, not to be mollified by the deacon’s admission—for the manner was offensive, though the words were kindly—“between you and me there should be silence in the matter of reproach. If you have to mourn over a daughter’s deceit, I have to lament a son’s folly. And there I stop; for the world shall judge who is the greater sufferer.”

Neither husband nor wife answered him.

“Mr. Strangfield,” he continued, turning quickly upon the deacon, with the sudden contrite air of a man who feels that he is wasting valuable time, “I have left my home early this morning expressly to bring you two items of news, one of which should properly be delivered by me only. First, as to my son’s disappearance :—

“There came a man to my house late last night, to inquire after me. He was a man belonging to the Preventive Service, and he said, being at an ale-house in the town not two hours before, there were persons there talking over the disappearance of Dr. Shaw’s son, and likewise the impressment of three men out of Greystone on that night or thereabouts, as it is concluded, of my son’s going. Now, it is very exactly known that three men were impressed; for no

other man is missing, unless it be my son. This coastguard sat considering what he had heard, and, taking particular note of the conjectures concerning my son thrown out by the gossips, he came round to my house (having finished his glass, and being off duty for the night) and asked me if it were true that I had a son who was missing. I replied that I had, and wondered he should not know it, for I conceived it was every man's talk in this district. However, I was sure the matter was news to him.

“Now, he said that, having heard that only three men were kidnapped, and being satisfied upon this point from what the fellows in the room told him, his reason for calling upon me was to state that on that night, when the press-gang was ashore, he was on duty with another man at the hut that stands to the south,

upon the cliff near my house, and at the head of the pass that leads to the sands. It was a windy night, he said, and his mate had gone half a mile along the cliff, to look at that curve of sand where some smuggling was done last Christmas, as you may remember, sir. There was moonlight abroad, and, riding clear of the breakers, though mightily tossed by the inshore seas, was a man-of-war's boat, which my man, about whom I am telling you, knew to belong to a brig-of-war that had that morning dropped anchor off the town.

“ Now, whilst he stood in the shelter of his hut, he saw a crowd of the boat's crew coming along through the dusk, and among them walked three prisoners ; and on the shoulders of two of them a fourth man was borne, bound like the others, but plainly insensible. The Preventive

man stood forth, and some of the men-of-war's men called a greeting to him as they passed. Indeed, he was as near to them as yonder window is to me, and could not, therefore, mistake what he beheld. Most solemnly does he swear that there were four men pinioned, and not three, as the town's gossip would show; and that of these four, who were clearly kidnapped men, as he might judge, one was carried; and though a confusion of shadow was cast upon them all by the hurrying of clouds over the moon, and the unequal and swerving steps of the men, yet is he positive that the carried man was young; and such description does he give me of him as leaves me in no doubt that the figure on the men's shoulders was my son."

He told the story in an equable voice, and on pausing extracted a pinch of snuff

from his box ; but the quiver of his nostril proclaimed a hard struggle with emotion, and it was easy to see that his application to his snuff-box was a stratagem to drop his eyes, and an excuse to hold his peace for a moment.

Mrs. Strangfield was about to speak ; but, with an imperious gesture of the hand, her husband silenced her.

“ This coastguard’s tale seems a likely one, sir, and makes the riddle of your son’s disappearance easy,” he said, with his hard eyes fixed upon the doctor. “ It is a pity there is but one witness.”

“ But one witness may rescue a man from damning dishonour, though there be no other evidence to prove his aspersers liars ! ” exclaimed the doctor, lifting his head with a flashing glance.

Mr. Strangfield met his gaze with a faint contemptuous smile.

"These coastguards," he said, "like other men of their condition, are fond of a glass, and the hope of earning a shilling will make them smart at inventions. One may be sure the man did not leave the school-house unrewarded."

The skin about the doctor's eyes tightened, and an expression of unspeakable contempt settled down upon his face.

"This is not the first time, Mr. Strangfield, that I have experienced your qualifications to render yourself offensive. A man so sceptical should surely possess a judgment above all chance of blundering."

"Dr. Shaw, I am a plain man, with little knowledge of fine words. Your tale may be truly believed by you, but it doth not satisfy me. Your son has acted the part of a villain, sir, and nothing that

does not prove him a villain in every step of the vile wrong he has done me and mine will I credit. Tell me rather that, having betrayed my child, he has meanly fled to escape my vengeance, and has put any rascal upon lying on his behalf! ”

He was white with his passion, and as he grasped the arms of his chair, the veins of his hands stood up, black with the energy that swelled them.

In the contempt and dislike with which Dr. Shaw, after a slight backward push of his chair, surveyed him, there seemed positive cruelty; for no insolence that Strangfield could be guilty of, could in a humane man's eyes qualify the moving influence of his deep and passionate emotion.

“ You are pleased, Mr. Strangfield, to call my son a villain. This did you term him once before. But my memory is not

keen, and I should be glad to hear again your reasons for abusing him."

"Oh, Dr. Shaw, my husband is beside himself this morning," wailed Mrs. Strangfield. "Our poor——"

"Silence!" thundered the shipwright. "It is to me this gentleman speaks. Leave me to answer him. Whatever may be your true purpose in calling upon me this morning, my own judgment upon it I will give you, and let the question you have now asked me find you a reason for what I shall say: that the father of a villain who has ruined my child, and brought desolation and shame upon an honourable home, must perforce be too much like his offspring not to have a relish for the wound his son has inflicted, and a pleasure in fingering it for the sake of his curiosity. Hold! you are not yet answered. Do you think I am to be touched by your

sneers, man? You would teach all those with whom you have to do to look down upon me, and such as me, as despicable men, holding a humble faith that makes your flaunting religion keek; and that your son hath ruined and disgraced any one of us, should give you no more concern than the scourging of a negro gives the white ruffian who looks on at the whipping! Is that it? Why, sir, be satisfied with your son's work: but you shall not stop me from calling him villain! You would know why? Look at my wife yonder. Is there no answer in her face? Look at this hand. Never did it tremble as now it does. I am aged a score since yesterday, and that is thy son's doing. No!" he shouted, in a strange shaking voice, "I'll not put my dishonour again into words. Sir, I wish you a good morning."

He rose from his chair and stood upright, with his hand extended towards the door. His wife sat in a crouching attitude, hugging herself. Dr. Shaw did not offer to move. His face was pale, but otherwise his manner was collected. He put his snuff-box in his pocket, and, drawing forth a pocket-book, he extracted a paper, which he held in his hand whilst he addressed Mr. Strangfield.

“Sir,” he said, in a slow, deliberate tone, “throughout my life I have ever striven to act the part of an upright man, resolute in the vindication of things I hold to be just and true, but always ready to acknowledge my errors. Through haste and surprise and disappointment which, in imitation of your own admirable candour, I shall be at no pains to dissemble, I have fallen into a grievous

error : that of misjudging youthful folly and calling it sin ; that of repelling with rude doubts the pleadings of helpless innocence ; that of denouncing my own flesh and blood as a monster of vice when he was not at hand to justify himself. But, sir, the God who rules over us is the Vindicator of the just, and last night I humbled myself before Him with gratitude and remorse. I beg you to be seated. I came to you with two items of news. One I have related, and the other I will now relate, in mercy to you who, by desiring me to leave the house, would be entailing upon yourself the endurance of a grief greater, *in spite of my theological opinions*, than I could wish you to know."

Mr. Strangfield continued standing, leaning heavily upon the back of a chair and looking down with a scowl upon the

doctor. Mrs. Strangfield, in a half-risen posture supporting herself with her hand upon the table, stretched eagerly forward, her eyes fixed on the paper in the doctor's grasp.

"Last night," continued the doctor, "after the coastguard left me, I reflected upon his story, and felt persuaded that the riddle of my son's disappearance was solved. But, though there was a melancholy satisfaction in detecting the means by which one portion of the mystery had been brought about, the boy's honour still remained befouled by the charges that had been made against him by you. It was clearly my duty to leave no stone unturned, either to prove that he was actually your daughter's husband, or that their connection was sinless, and the affirmations of your daughter the delusions of an ignorant loving woman. This

morning, I should have taken the coach to London, and remained in that city until every vestry had been searched by persons I should have hired for that purpose, and every clergyman and dissenting minister officiating called upon. But I have been mercifully spared a duty which, at my time of life, would have made heavy demands on my strength. Before retiring to rest, I entered my son's bedroom. Up to that moment, beyond a cursory inspection of the room, I had made no close examination of it. But I felt that it would greatly facilitate my project if I could obtain some clue to the name or neighbourhood of the church where they were married; and I further remembered that he had written to me one letter from his lodgings, though I could not find that letter, and had no recollection of the address upon it. I found his desk

in a drawer, and had no difficulty in opening it by a bunch of keys of my own. Sir, among letters of his mother, most tenderly preserved, and letters signed in your daughter's name, I found this document" (holding it up) "carefully sealed in a sheet of paper, on which was written *Jenny Shaw*; and I also found," continued the doctor, drawing from his side pocket a small sheepskin volume, "this little diary, some passages of which, sir, I will take the liberty to read."

There was breathless silence between husband and wife whilst the doctor turned the leaves in search of the entry he proposed first to read. Mr. Strangfield never shifted his posture nor moderated his frown; but over his wife's face was creeping the illumination of an expression of joy pathetic to behold, in the

growing gladness of her eyes and the faint parting of her lips.

The doctor read :—

“ ‘ *April 3, 1806.*—I am bewitched by Jenny Strangfield’s beauty. It is a fortnight ago since I first addressed her, and to-day we conversed like old friends. Strange that anything so sweet and gloriously feminine should be found among the hard conditions and rigours of the sect of whose prejudices her father is the most acid exponent hereabouts.’ ”

The doctor turned the leaves slowly, skipping evidently much that was too personal for himself to read aloud in the presence of the deacon with relish.

“ ‘ *May 20.*—To-day I told Jenny I loved her. She believes me; and well she may, for truly is she dearest of all earthly things to me now. “ You should not love me,” she said; “ for what would thy

father say to hear that thou art in love with Michael Strangfield's girl?" What wonderful tenderness her voice gains from use of that quaint, old-fashioned *thee*-ing and *thou*-ing!"

"Why do you read such stuff, sir?" cried Mr. Strangfield, with an air of sullen impatience. "You have something to prove by producing that book. Come to it—or leave it, if it be as I think—for you shall not dangle our dishonour in our face, sir. By God! your cool recital of your son's infamy shall not drive me mad!"

His face was again dark with passion, and well might the violence of an emotion that could force an oath from Strangfield startle even the imperturbable Dr. Shaw.

"I must detain you another minute," said the doctor, curling his lip, whilst he rapidly turned the leaves of the diary,

“and then I am done. Here is the one entry that concerns you :—

“‘*June* 18.—This day I was married to Jenny Strangfield at the Church of St. Matthew, Dane Street, London. Have I, as her sweetheart and husband, acted wisely for my darling by this secrecy? I will have no fear, but thank God humbly for His precious gift. How timid she was! All the way from Sydenham she scarcely spoke; and her hand was as cold as stone in mine as we went into the church—a gloomy church indeed, with a mistiness all about the altar, as if the fogs of winter had not had time to escape. How much happier and easier to have been married in the dear old church at Greystone, with her father and mine to give us a kindly word. But it is the mother’s kiss my darling must most miss. Love shall atone, my little wife. Good night—good night!’”

Mrs. Strangfield started up with a wild, loud laugh.

“Oh, Michael!” she cried, in an eerie, jubilant voice, raising her clasped hands above her head, “did not I tell thee our only one was pure? Oh, Dr. Shaw, he would not believe her! He is a stern father to the dear heart. He turned from her when she wished to kiss him, and to me hath called her a vile name—and, O God! he hath driven her from us. She is gone away from her home, sir! This very morning we found her gone! Oh, cruel! cruel! He would not let me seek her—and now where is my innocent lamb? Is she dead of a broken heart? Oh, my pretty one! why did I bear thee for this sorrow? Better had we died—better had we died, than lived to see this bitter, wicked time!”

With the joyous look fled from her

white features, she dropped her face into her hollowed hands and broke into piteous sobbing.

With laborious roll of the eyes, which had a vacant look under the darkness of the hanging brow, Mr. Strangfield gazed from her to the doctor, from the doctor to her; and he made a picture of a strong man smitten with a great and deadly fear, or a man whose brains are crazing under the apprehension of an unspeakable grief: for so he looked.

But obstinacy is an instinct—for qualities are drooping and dying when instinct is still a flourishing force—which will survive many shocks, and give battle amid the languors of dissolution and prompt the last breath; as who that has attended the dying but knows?

Though the diary furnished evidence which ninety and nine men of a hundred

would have yielded their judgment to in calm certainty that the truth was at last made plain, it was evidence that could not despatch the stubborn shipwright's conviction. With a slow smile, so full of anguish that all sarcasm was lost in it, and holding firmly to his chair that the giddiness in his head might not cause his body to vibrate, he waited until his wife had drowned her speech in sobs; and turning to the doctor, who had now risen, and was looking at him with a gaze of steady contempt and dislike, he exclaimed, in a thick and struggling voice—

“Who is to prove to me that the characters in that book be your son's writing? If my girl's chastity be broken, stronger cement than that 'll be needed to mend it. And until I am better assured that your son hath acted honestly by my girl, not ten thousand times the

number of his pretty words shall stop me from calling him villain ! ”

“ Read that ! ” said the doctor, and he thrust the paper he held into the deacon’s hand, and took up his hat and made a step towards the door.

Mr. Strangfield, still wearing his painful smile, opened the paper with a shake of the head and looked at it vacantly, holding it at a distance from him, as a man might who scarcely deems the thing he is asked to read worth the trouble of spectacles.

“ Michael,” cried his wife, “ your glasses are in your pocket. Read it quickly, husband, for my sake—or give it to me ! I will read it aloud.”

She went towards him, but with a faltering gesture he warned her off. Then slowly, with stubbornness in every move of his arm, he drew out his spectacle-case

and put on his glasses, and went round to the other side of his chair, which was nearer to the window, to read.

They could not see his face, for it was towards them, and he held the paper before it. A whole minute passed; then said Dr. Shaw, in a whisper, pitying the agony of the poor mother, "Madam, your daughter is lawfully my son's wife: that is the certificate of their marriage."

But she made him no answer, for she was watching her husband. How long he was mastering the contents of the paper! Suddenly his tall figure swayed; from side to side it went, with something of the rhythmical action of a pendulum.

"He is dying!" shrieked the wife, and bounded forward; but too late to break the fall of the man as he dropped with a crash, the full length of him, upon the floor of the parlour.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GREYHOUND INN.

“Jog on, jog on, the footpath way,
And merrily hent the stile-a ;
A merry heart goes all the way,
Your sad tires in a mile-a.”

Winter's Tale.

THE sweetest hour of the summer day is when the silver sun looks to be risen as high as tenfold its own glorious circumference above a level line of land ; when all the dews are not yet drunk by it, and thin vapours still hang crisply over the meadows ; when the ringing joy of the lark courts the eye to the blue heavens, and winged aromas come nimbly

flying, and the heavy grain-fields salute, with rich and stately swellings, the splendours of the young day.

Through a fruitful land, bounded by blue hills, in places dark with the soft grouping of trees, and here and there a break of lustrous water, went the white level road that led to Winston; corn-fields to right and left, and tracts of vivid green soaring, and the bland eye of the ocean shining betwixt the two tall heights of cliff.

Along this road, with steps that offered no defiance to time, walked Jenny and her old companion, and the movements of Mrs. Mead showed, at all events, that if the sun had overtaken them unduly, the fault was the girl's.

How otherwise should it have been? To weariness of mind the halest body will succumb, and two whole nights had

Jenny passed without sleep. Her feet dragged heavily; the glare of the sunshine, which no veil could exclude, and the drowsy kissing of the air, which would not be denied, put weight into her eyelids and on her lips. Though but half the distance was compassed, she had lost all power of speech, all heart to give effort to her tongue. The very faculty of thought was numbed; and drearily, with piteous hanging hands, and slow mechanical gait often stumbling among the ruts that scored the road, she trudged at the side of the old woman, who frequently had to slacken her pace that she might not leave the girl behind.

Now, no old woman was ever better qualified to prove that two persons are not needful for talk than Mrs. Mead, who could sustain a conversation whilst there was a listener, and often without; as

witness her frequent chats with herself. But she, too, had been awake all night ; and, to speak the truth, a light box will become no mean weight on an ancient arm when carried for above an hour. Moreover, bones of which age has turned the sap into powder, and made brittle as a spear of ice hanging down from an eave, abhor every road that jolts the frame, and threatens the feeble sinews of the ankle ; so that by this time her dry tongue had rattled off all it was now disposed to coil to ; and in perfect silence they advanced, the old woman busy in her mind, though where her thoughts were confined might positively be known by her deliberate looks at the girl.

At last, coming to a turn of the road—a truly magnificent bend of lofty hedge, with golden monuments of hay behind, and a rich, cool orchard beyond, again—

there appeared at the very bottom—or end of it, rather, for level as a river it ran just here—a grey stone front with ivy grandly endowed, and further on a row of little cottages, with a church to the right of them, pointing a flaming apex to heaven.

“Here we are, dearie!” exclaimed Mrs. Mead; “Winston at last! And the Lord bless it for coming upon us just when I’m beginning to think thy box here hath some pounds o’ lead at the bottom on’t.”

“Let me carry it now,” said Jenny in a painfully languid voice.

“No, no. I’m still good for that bit o’ distance. D’ye see that board hanging up yonder? That’s the Greyhound; an’ if there be no fire i’ the kitchen that’ll bile us a dish o’ tea, Sally ’ll have no more o’ my love, though it bain’t six o’clock yet, if the sun don’t lie.”

By the village clock it was a little more than half-past five, but to both of them the drag had seemed to occupy a long morning. Yet the villagers were awake, and at work; smoke was circling into the blue air out of chimneys; hens, freed from the servitude of a night's cooping, pecked in the roadway; while here and there a woman scrubbed the stone step of her door, and already stood a market-gardener's cart at the ale-house facing the Greyhound.

A little inn was the Greyhound, to take the eye in a picture as a sweet bit of rustic painting, for simplicity inimitable. With low, cleanly windows down almost upon the road, permitting a glimpse of snug and pretty rooms within, and an overhanging story framed in delicate Gothic angle, the woodwork chocolate-coloured, and a door, half made of glass,

partially screened with red baize, furnishing, through a shining space, hospitable hints of crystal for lips of thirsty men, and little brass-bound mahogany barrels, and the blush and glow of flowers intermixed from the wilderness of walled garden at the rear. The building stood looking up the great highway, of which the road from Greystone was but a vein or tributary, so to speak. From the upper windows of this inn, the highway could be followed, rising and falling in a white line, until to right and left it vanished in a tiny thread of white among the blue shadows. This was the great road to London from the south-eastern coast of England; and the coaches that ran upon it were, by Greystone travellers, met twenty-one miles onwards at a famous ancient city, to which they were borne by Mr. Franklin's coach, chosen

often in preference to this stage of Winston, as it saved a walk or the hire of a hackney-coach, and was a pleasant ride.

Paying small heed to the scrutiny of slow eyes at the windows and doors of the cottages, Mrs. Mead, preceding Jenny, led the way to the door of the inn, and, finding it locked, put down the box and pulled the house-bell hard.

They had not long to wait. A servant, newly risen, came to the glass, and after a prolonged stare at Mrs. Mead's features, opened the door.

"Tell Mrs. Walker that Judith Mead is come from Greystone to see her. And take this here box, and lead us to a room wi' chairs in't, whiles our legs have life in 'em, if ye don't want the job of carrying of us," exclaimed Mrs. Mead. And the girl, thus admonished, ridding the old lady of her burden, conducted her and

Jenny into a parlour to the right of the bar.

With a groan of weariness the old woman tumbled herself down upon a chair, and Jenny sank languidly upon a sofa.

“Well, if ever I should ha’ believed Winston to be so far!” exclaimed Mrs. Mead, lifting her bonnet off her grey hair and throwing it upon the table.

“How do ye feel, dear heart? Tired you look as niver I see the like; but I have promised thee a good snatch o’ sleep betwixt breakfast and the coach-hour, and that ye’ll git. And here is Sally, whose mother I remimber as the prettiest-waisted wench i’ this part o’ the country. Don’t curtsy to me, my dear, for my bones ’ll not allow of my rising. How are ye—how are ye?”

She addressed these words to a stout,

kindly-faced young woman, who had come suddenly into the room, and now stood staring at and curtsying first to Jenny and then to Mrs. Mead.

“Sally,” continued the old woman, “we have walked all the way from Grey-stone to get a sup o’ breakfast afore t’ coach starts. What have ye got i’ the house to comfort th’ inside of an old friend—and a lady, whose beauty should make ye proud to sarve her? Speak out, my love, and niver fear to name thy choicest. Is it a pretty slice from a tender side o’ bacon, with the eggs which the hens are now singing over, and a pot o’ thy best tea, wi’ cream to give it a dainty colour? That will do—that will do, Sally; but I’ll not gi’ ye a farden for it all, if ye don’t make the saucy wench, as ogled me through your glass door, brisk in cooking of it.”

—

“What! Mrs. Mead? Who’d iver ha’ thought of seeing you this time o’ morn-ing!” cried Mrs. Walker, in a rich, clear voice. “Where be ye going by t’ coach? Not to Lunnon, at thy time o’ life! Well, well! only last night did I say to Roger, ‘Next time thee goest to Greystone, see that ye fill the biggest basket wi’ the largest gooseberries for Mrs. Mead, that she may know Sally is alive and wishes her health.’ How strange, now! An’ it’s breakfast you’re wanting at once? That you shall have, an’ quickly. Hi! Martha!” she called at the door; and a voice answered, “Here I be, missis!” “Run out and bring in what eggs ye can find, and first set the kittle on; and if ye stay talking with jackanapes Johnny, I’ll know you by my clock, which I’m looking at now! There’s breakfast for two to get, and

if your shoes hinder ye from running, toss 'em off!"

She looked back into the room with a merry laugh, which died away on her catching sight of Jenny's face, for the girl had lifted her veil. Observing the change of expression in her friend's face, Mrs. Mead frowned knowingly upon her, with an extremely suggestive shake of the head, and then begged for the loan of a pair of slippers, which Mrs. Walker immediately went to procure.

"Now, mistress," said the old woman, in her kindest manner, and hobbling over to Jenny, "ye must make yourself comfortable here, and there's no reason agin it. A better-hearted young woman than Sally there is not in this world. Niver you heed her if she look at thee. It will be your beauty that fetches her eyes and nothing else; for this is a

house of call, and them who kapes such houses soon loses all curiosity. 'You shall breakfast and then lie down for a mossel o' sleep. Why, my dear, what beautiful hair is yours! 'Tis like putting one's hand on feathers, and just the colour o' the hair o' some of them drawings ye see on church windows when the sun shines through them.'

This bit of praise was provoked by her gentle removal of Jenny's hat; then she slipped the shawl off the girl's shoulders, and knelt down to take off her shoes and chafe the little feet.

Grief and fatigue are by no means such conditions as beauty covets for their physical gifts; yet it was a question if Jenny's loveliness was impaired by the whiteness of her face and the languid droop of her eyelids, and the mournful set and curve into which sorrow had twitched

the sweetness of her mouth. Her hands were folded wearily on her lap, and her wedding-ring glistened.

“How kind and good you are to me, Mrs. Mead!” she said. “If ever my darling comes back to me, how will he love and bless you for your goodness to his wife! If I could get a little rest first, I could eat some breakfast; but, indeed, I do not think I could swallow food now.”

“Well, perhaps ye are right,” replied Mrs. Mead, thoughtfully, still on her knees, with Jenny’s foot in her hands; “food will not do ye much good while your fancy’s agin it, and your head is aching for sleep. Ah, here is Sally. Thank ye, Sally. I’ll put ’em on in a moment. Why, they’re your husband’s, I declare! Lard, is my foot as big as all that!”

“Anyways, they’ll fit thee, Mrs. Mead,”

exclaimed Sally, with her merry laugh, dropping the slippers on the floor; "and a slipper's a poor job if it don't fit loose."


"Now, see here, Sally," continued Mrs. Mead, rising off her knees with one of those involuntary groans which old folks like her will send up over any harsh exercise of their bones; "this lady wants some sleep, and I'll thank ye, my dear, for the loan of a quiet room for her, where the drawn blinds 'll make her poor eyes think it night."

"If ye'll come with me, ma'am, I'll lead you straight to such a room as Mrs. Mead asks for," said Sally with a curtsy, giving Jenny the "ma'am" on account of her wedding-ring, which the quick eye of the woman spied instantly.

With a feeble smile of thanks, Jenny slipped her feet into her shoes and, taking up her hat and shawl, followed Mrs.

Walker out of the room, and Mrs. Mead went creaking after them.

Now, though Mrs. Mead had represented Mrs. Walker as hardened into in-curiosity by her calling as hostess, the truth was Mrs. Walker was still, and was ever likely to remain, a thorough woman in respect of inquisitiveness when any real object of curiosity came under her attention. To this quality, which after all is harmless enough when it prompts honest and kindly hearts, Jenny was indebted for the promptness with which she was conducted to a bedroom and made comfortable in it; for Mrs. Walker was very anxious to have Mrs. Mead alone, that she might hear all that was to be told about this beautiful young girl with the wedding-ring on her finger, and what part in the mysterious little play Judith herself was taking.



"There," said the old woman, when Jenny had stretched her length upon the bed and her hot forehead pressed the snow of the pillow—"there," said she, pinning the curtains together, so as to effectually darken the room, "now ye'll think it's night; and a good two hours you've got, and every inch of it must be sleep wi' ye."

"Give me a kiss before you go," whispered Jenny, putting up her lips.

The old woman bent her furrowed face over the girl; and, as she turned away, the notion struck Sally that all three of them were in a very fit state to cry.

Gently they quitted the room, and closed the door upon the girl.

"Niver was creature born more sweetly lovable than that dear heart," exclaimed the old woman as she hobbled downstairs, holding on to the banister. "Do ye

know, Sally, that she is Mike Strangfield's darter, the Baptist deacon—him as talks o' hell-fire as coolly as thee talkest of thy big gooseberries?"

"Ye dunno say so! Well, now, thought I whin I see her, 'Missy, I know thy face.' What, in the name o' goodness and mussy, brings her to Winston this time o' morn?—and she a wife, as any creature might see with one eye by her ring, not to speak of her pale face, poor thing."

"Is this the room I came out of? Yes, there's my bonnet. Now, Sally, no word dost thee get from me till my breakfast is gotten," said Mrs. Mead, sitting herself down; "and then maybe I'll make your eyes big, and give ye a secret worth all that iver you did hear sin' ye left your mammy's breast."

Such a promise was sufficient to put

alacrity into a doll. Off went Sally, and in ten minutes' time a good repast was smoking under Mrs. Mead's appreciative nose. Yet, though the old woman did good justice to the sweet country food, there was a contemplative manner about her, a thoughtful hesitancy, an absent glaring at nothing in particular, the while her old jaws kept her temples leaping, that indicated a mind in labour.

Mrs. Walker, who breakfasted with her for company's sake—for her husband had gone to Marples and was there stopping—watched her anxiously and spoke seldom, until breakfast was done; and then Mrs. Mead, with a little thanksgiving to the Lord for her meal, folded her hands and told Sally all about the cause that had brought Jenny to Winston.

The mighty master Shakespeare, who knew all things, among his other know-


ledges had infinite perception into ejaculation, and of its value was so exquisite a judge that never does astonishment in his pages weary.

This Shakesperian gift might have seemed Sally Walker's now; for to give you in their full abundance all the ohs! and the ahs! the well, wells! the lawk-a-daisies! the dear heart alives! the I nevers! and the eloquent ejaculations of her eyes, and the simpering wonder of her mouth, which her tongue and face delivered while Mrs. Mead related Jenny's story, would fill a chapter; and yet they gave the old narrator delight, and so fed her imagination and inspired the excitement of deeper amazement, that truth halted in her rear, and the old thing fibbed poor Jenny into something beyond the dreams of romance.

Why, put a cup of tea into the hand of

a woman aged threescore and ten, and show me what shall stop her cackle if it be not a bow-string ! Were her old bones to be rattled all the way from Greystone to Winston merely to bring the truth ? Since she had earned the shame of a gossip, let her enjoy the bliss of gossiping, at least. Her story took an hour to relate by the clock ; and when she had made an end, what had been hot on the table was cold ; the sun had come round into the window to look at the prater, and the cool breeze of the dawn had been smothered in the sultry arms of a burning morning.

“ Now, my dear,” said she, “ I want you to go upstairs and look at the girl to see if she sleeps—for how it may be with the wenches of this age I know not, but whenever *I* was troubled, as a young un, I niver could sleep. Don’t come back



now and tell me she's awake. If you do ye'll spoil a good scheme."

Mrs. Walker went away softly, and, after an absence of five minutes, returned with the information that Jenny was in a deep slumber.

"But law, dear heart alive! what a beauty she is! More lovely than a picture! And there she lies, with her left hand agin her chin, just as if she had fallen asleep kissin' her weddin'-ring. Poor dearie! I never liked the look o' that Strangfield, somehow. Wood's all very well to build ships with, but when I see a man's face made of it, it don't seem to take my fancy much."

"Sally," exclaimed Mrs. Mead, clasping her hands in her lap, and frowning portentously on her, "can 'ee keep a secret?"

"Why, as niver you could believe of a married woman."

“What’s the true hour for the coach to come to thy door?”

“Eight o’clock ; true as a hair, if there bain’t no accident.”

“Sally, I’ll tell ’ee what it is: Mistress, upstairs, mustn’t go to Marples. I argeyed wi’ her last night when she come to me. It’s only her fear o’ the neighbours as makes shame of her business yet ; but if she roon away and come back no more, what’ll the town think?”

“Well, now you speak it, Mrs. Mead, I’ll be plain. If I did not hear thee say she be married, I’d niver believe it, for her laving home.”

“There!” shouted the old woman ; “have I lived all these years i’ the world to be taught wisdom by a wench ? With might and main I argeyed, and, like her father, she looked at me, and that was the good I did. I told her I didn’t like the

business, and would have no hand in it. Yet, see what good natur' is, and what long journeys it putteth old people upon! But to Marples she'll not go with my leave; and if the coach don't wake her, she shall lie till it's gone."

"And what then will ye do, Mrs. Mead?"

"What then will I do? Ah, an' ye would like me to speak quicker nor I can think. Oh, Sally! thou art a cormorant for news! Sith gluttony! Well, well!"

Sally laughed, and, looking at the clock, exclaimed—

"If she sleep for another half-hour she'll not get to Marples this day."

There was a pretty long silence whilst Mrs. Mead reflected.

"I see what I mun do!" she cried out at last, with great vehemence. "Her mother must know where she is—for

here she'll be all day if she don't wake for the coach ; and that'll be my dooty. Let folks speak ill of me then ! Is there iver a cart goin' to Greystone ? Thee must find out. I'll not walk it."

"Tut, tut ! Johnny shall drive ye in the van. It's big enough to hold thee !" replied Mrs. Walker.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALONE.

“ This trick may chance to scath you. I know what :
You must contrary me. Marry, 'tis time.”

Romeo and Juliet.

UPSTAIRS lay Jenny, in the deep slumber which profound weariness in youth begets; the solemn sleep that, like death, smooths the countenance into an expression for which human knowledge has no definition. Without a stir in her she lay, and the mysterious sweetness of her face was a sight for love to look upon with fear.

Suddenly she started, and awoke with

one of those quick leapings from sleep which the sleepless soul will force the body into, and sat erect, with a frown of bewilderment, and her beautiful eyes alarmed and eager. She had no watch to tell the hour, but upon the carpet lay a streak of sunshine, and the mellow glory of it was a hint to draw her quickly to the window.

The sun was high, and a splendour as of noontide upon the land. In sure belief that she had overslept the hour for the passing of the coach, she took her hat in her hand and went downstairs. The first thing she beheld was the big Dutch clock just beside the door; the hands of it pointed to the quarter past ten, so that Marples was not to be reached that day without posting.

With her eyes fixed upon the clock, she stood on the last step of the staircase,

and her baffled intentions plainly showed in the wonder and embarrassment of her face;—until Mrs. Walker threw open the glass door of the bulkhead dividing the passage from what would now be termed the bar, and, dropping her a little curtsy, hoped that she was the better for her rest.

“But I have missed the coach, I fear,” said Jenny, “if that clock be right.”

“It is right enough, ma’am. But Mrs. Mead is in the parlour, and will tell thee how this happ’d, if she be not sleeping,” replied Mrs. Walker, with something like a look of contrition on her face, if it were not nervousness.

Without further words, Jenny pushed open the parlour door, and there, sure enough, at full length upon the sofa, was Mrs. Mead asleep. With her head on one

side, dropped clear of the bolster, her mouth open, and one honest leg revealed to the knee (a queer muddle of wrinkled stocking; for what hose would fit such a shank?), she lay; and such deep-toned snoring came from her, such writhings of sound, and steady pouring of groans, as kept the two glasses, that touched one another upon the table near her head, jingling as though a waggon were passing.

But Jenny was in straits which would not permit of tender thoughtfulness. She wanted to know why she had been allowed to miss the coach, and what she was now to do. And so gave Mrs. Mead a push, which set the old woman talking in her sleep. "Ay, ay, thee need'st not bother—the Lord love 'ee—an' it's as true as this hand—yaw!"

"Mrs. Mead! Mrs. Mead!"

The old woman opened her eyes, stared

at Jenny, lifted her head, gave a terrific yawn, and, planting her loose knuckles into the network about her eyes, exclaimed, in a smothering voice, "I've bin asleep, I do believe!"

"Mrs. Mead, it's a quarter past ten, and the coach has been gone this long while. Oh, why was I allowed to sleep! I shall not get away this day; and here must I stop, for I have not money enough to hire a post-chaise!" cried Jenny.

"Sit down, mistress, and think a bit before ye quarrel. For maybe I'll be showing ye that it's no fault o' mine ye've missed the coach, and then how sorrowful would your heart be for being angry with Mother Mead, who loves you," said the old woman, continuing to rub her eyes until all the sleep was squeezed out of them. "Sally, Sally!" she squeaked; and on Mrs. Walker running in,

Mrs. Mead exhorted her to procure breakfast at once for Jenny, and to look in upon them again presently, which was as good as saying, "Don't listen now, at all events."

"You must not think I could be angry with you," said the girl mournfully, "but it is a sad thing for me to lose the coach; for I hoped to be with Bridget this day, and in a quiet place, where I could think how I am to act in the future."

"And what's to stop you thinking here?" exclaimed Mrs. Mead. "Isn't it quiet enough?—for hours together ye shall hear no sound but the hens talking and scraping in the road. Besides, it's nearer thy home nor Marples. And Jenny, Mrs. Jenny! I'll own to thee it's my fault ye missed t' coach; and it were my wish ye should. What did I say to 'ee last night? Dreadful scandal will follow you

when folks hear you have roon away, and I *will* not help thee to be foolish."

Jenny looked at her with astonishment and fear. Whatever force the objection might still possess, she thought that Mrs. Mead had put it aside for good and all when she offered to walk with her to Winston.

"Give yourself time to think," continued the old woman. "If ye should have a mind to return to your mother, 'tis an easy walk from here; if you will still go forward, then the coach will be at this door to-morrow morn. But ye be taking a mighty step in quitting home without iver letting a cratur' but me know where you've gone. It's because I love you that I've let you miss the coach, and given you a whole day for reflection wi' thy home close at hand."

"My mind is quite made up," said

Jenny, moving restlessly about the room.

"I will not return home."

"Well, that you say now, but by-and-by you will be thinking another way."

"I am grieved to have missed the coach, but I am not angry," she went on, in a subdued but firm tone. "It will be dull work for me here all day; for I suppose you will return to Greystone?"

The old woman nodded. Jenny looked at her hard.

"Mrs. Mead, be frank with me. What do you mean to do? Shall you tell mother where I am?"

"I'll not answer ye," replied the old woman, rather sulkily, not liking Jenny's sharpness.

"You have sworn to keep my secret," said the girl, reproachfully.

"Suppose the first man I met in the

street should be Mr. Shaw?" cried the old woman in a shrill voice.

Jenny turned to the window and looked through it in silence.

It was a long way to Marples, and but one coach to it, and that was gone. The next town was eight miles distant, and she shrunk from the long walk and the notion of her loneliness when she should arrive at it; for she had no friend there, and the curiosity and staring of the people at any inn she might enter would be hardly less galling and painful than the frowns or averted eyes of people in Greystone. Yet, her mind being resolved never to return to her home, where basest thoughts were held of her, she had a dreadful fear of meeting her mother, who would surely follow at once, if Mrs. Mead proclaimed her whereabouts. How would she be able to resist her mother's pas-

sionate supplications and reproaches—those appeals to a love which, God knows, was never so strong as now, when she thought of her mother's cherishing sympathy, and the tears she must surely have wept over her pretty one's empty bedroom?

“See now, my dearie,” said Mrs. Mead, mildly; “will ye let me judge how to act for you? If you were my child I could not wish you better than I do; and thy fame, which must be the dearest thing a woman hath, is my reason for hindering your journey this day. Neither you nor me knows what is being said i' Greystone, and things may hap to-day to make 'ee thankful you had not all the way from Marples to come. Bide here while I go to Greystone. I'll find out about thy mother, and how she bears thy going, and what is said of thee, and all

that should be known. And to-night will I return with what news there is; and it shall either be that you return to thy home again, or go straight on into the world, as shall seem best on what report I bring you."

If Mrs. Mead had said this at first, Jenny would have understood her motives. But, says an ancient adage: "When you hear an old woman talk straight, you shall see your cow walk on its hind legs."

"There may be good sense in what you say," replied Jenny, who had turned from the window and stood with her fine eyes fixed on Mrs. Mead; "and here will I stop till you come back. But, truly, I do not know that any news you could bring should take me home again. For when father misses me his anger will be terrible, and not to save my life would

I face him without proof that I am an honest girl."

At this moment Mrs. Walker came in with Jenny's breakfast. She chose to prepare the table herself, that she might have a good sight of the young wife; for Jenny was a wonderful heroine in the hostess's eyes, and created a chance for imagination to chew upon that deserved to be made much of.

"Your papa is known to me, ma'am," said she, curtsying, in token that the breakfast was ready. "I heerd him preach a sermon once—nay, it weer a lecture, as I remimber—in St. Martin's Hall, down Beach Street, in your town. He hath a strong voice, and is a fine man, as I think. Is he quite well?"

With a sad smile Jenny answered her; and as she seated herself at table, Mrs. Mead asked Sally about the waggon that was to carry her to Greystone.

“Johnny shall put the horse to when it pleases ye,” replied Sally.

“The sooner the better,” said the old woman, striving to catch Jenny’s eye, that she might bestow a knowing look upon her. “The mistress here will stay till I return, and you will do your best to amuse her, Sally.”

“Well, she shall do as she please, and heartily welcome indeed.”

“See that her dinner be choice. I’ve praised your cooking, so ye’ll not make a lie o’ my words.”

Jenny looked up with a smile, and Sally burst into a laugh.

“Did ye iver hear such an old chatter-box, ma’am?” she cried. “There niver was the like of her tongue. When my husband finds me stubborn, as sometimes he should, God bless him, for the good it does, he allers says, ‘Sally, if ye

don't mind me, I'll go fetch Judith Mead.' That's because he knows Mrs. Mead could talk a deaf man into hearin', and make a blind man leap o'er a ditch."

"So ye see, my dear," said Mrs. Mead, with exquisite complacency, "that though I've lived all my life at Greystone pretty nigh, ye must come to Winston to get a good character of me. Now, Sally, get thee gone to thy man, and let him bring the waggon round. And bid him put a bit o' hay for me to sit on i' the bottom, for I know what thy road will do for waggon-wheels; and if jump I must, let me fall soft, for thy mother's sake."

The so-called waggon was a small metamorphosed cart, with a canvas hood, and wheels stout enough to support a house. In ten minutes' time it was at the door, and on the near shaft of it sate, with his hobnail boots within a foot of

the road, a sour-faced man, who sucked an inverted pipe, and doggedly combed horse-flies off the rough hide of the horse with a whip.

Sally came into the parlour to announce it, and Mrs. Mead at once got up and put on her old bonnet and shawl.

"I shall find ye here when I come back?" said she, interrogatively, holding Jenny's hand.

"Yes, I will wait for you," replied the girl, wearily, with the now familiar absent look in her eyes.

The old woman hobbled out of the room after her friend, and with a hard expression of misery on her face, Jenny went to the sofa and leaned her head upon it.

Beyond the uneasiness inspired by the delay in her wished-for distant removal from the town in which, as she believed,

her name would be on every tongue, coupled with base suspicions of her purity, she felt no great disappointment; to her tired heart one place was as good as another. So languid was the movement of her mind, it had scarce power to take cognizance of its own desires. The one deep yearning for her husband was with her always; but, like a familiar ache in the body, habit had already induced a kind of insensibility to it. Of resolute contemplation she found herself incapable. Sudden agonizing throbs visited her when she thought of her mother, and the dreadful dishonour that had falsely and cruelly come upon them all. But there was the merciful assuagement of a torpor, created by acute mental suffering, upon her; her fears and doubts were involuntary instincts disturbing the brooding haze of bewilderment. Quite motionless

she sat, an uncherished lovely form, with the stupefaction of heart-breaking grief in her face, and the muteness of death in her eyes.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. MEAD RETURNS TO GREYSTONE.

“Here comes the lady—let her witness it.”

Othello.

“I KNOW I’m doin’ right. Niver could I hold up my head if they got saying it were Judith Mead as helped Michael’s girl to roon away and leave her character behind her,” said Mrs. Mead to herself as the waggon drove off; and upon a loosened truss of hay she sat, right in the centre of the vehicle, staring out of the shadow at the pretty little inn that was dropping behind.

It was eleven o’clock, and the sun hot

indeed ; and the shagged forefeet of the horse struck out of the road a very fine dust, which, mixing with the hot air that passed through the hood of the cart, seemed to increase the temperature by many degrees.

Mrs. Mead loosened her bonnet-strings and opened the neck of her dress, and looked hard at the back of the head of the sour-faced man, whose canvas cap was a trifle below the level of the front board of the cart. But there was something so stolid in the manner in which he took the jerks of the vehicle, letting his body hop with a savage indifference to the value of elastic adjustment, something so obstinate and morose in the mat of black hair that hung upon the collar of his coat, that even Mrs. Mead was repelled, and held her peace.

For the space of ten minutes, and a

trifle faster than a snail carries its shell, they jolted along the road, when suddenly the cart halted.

“Missis!” shouted Johnny, without turning his head, “ye doan’t moind stoppin’, do ye?”

“What for?” cried Mrs. Mead, starting out of a reverie, and gazing eagerly at the canvas cap.

“What for?” replied the man with sour disdain. “Do ye thinks I’s e carrion-mate, to be toorned into woorms wi’ bloudy flies? I’m a-goin’ to git down.”

“And what’s to become o’ me?” exclaimed Mrs. Mead, standing erect in the cart, at the risk of a fall if the horse moved.

“Doomed if I know,” answered the man, dropping slowly on to the road; “an’ doomed if oi care, missus. Fourteen

shellen' and sixpence a week 'll not pay me to kape flies fat!"

Not without horror, induced by the violence of his adjectives, the solemnity of his movements, and the mysteriousness of his motives, did Mrs. Mead survey him. He stood in the road, laboriously groping in his pockets, and, after endless search, drew forth a large red pocket-handkerchief, which he opened and held up and eyed all over; he then took off his cap and placed it between his knees, threw the handkerchief over his head, put on his cap again, and sluggishly recovered his seat on the shaft.

"Now, missus," said he, "they may bite thee if they're wanten' more groob. Hold on, or ye'll roon a moocker!"

He struck his horse over the tail, and Mrs. Mead had barely squatted herself down when they were moving again.

Without further stoppage they arrived at the top of the High Street of Grey-stone.

"This'll do, mister," exclaimed Mrs. Mead, who had no opinion of Johnny as a driver, and was weary of the jolting inflicted on her, and the miserably slow way they made; "ye needn't go no further."

Johnny, however, refused to take any notice of her request. There was an ale-house some distance down the street, and not until the waggon was abreast of it did he cry, "Whoa!" Then, dropping from his perch, with a trifle of briskness in the action, he came round to the back of the cart and said, "Ye can git down here if ye loiike."

The old woman scrambled down as best she could, and Johnny looked on with a grin at her boots. Then correcting his smile, as she faced round upon him, he said—

"This here's the Wheatsheaf, and the flavey in the liquor is as foine as though 'twar all roon stoof."

"Ye're welcome to drink as much as iver they'll trust ye with," replied Mrs. Mead, tartly.

"Aren't ye goin' to stand summat?" cried the man.

"Yes, half a pint o' vinegar, if ye're good to drink it," answered the old woman.

"Go along, or I'll git ye drownt for a witch!" shouted the disappointed Johnny; and off she went, chuckling audibly.

Not ten yards, however, could she go without meeting an acquaintance. Who should this be but old Mrs. Bruff, going to her snuff-shop in George Street, with her dinner in a paper parcel.

"Good mornin', Mrs. Mead. How are you? 'Tis an age sin' I seen ye my

way. What nasty weather is this! I cannot walk for the cling o' my clothes; and as to the flies—well, I reckon we must be 'Gyptians, to deserve sitch a cuss," said Mrs. Bruff, a corpulent old woman, quite as aged as Mrs. Mead, but looking a deal younger.

"I'm middlin' well, thank 'ee, Mrs. Bruff. As to comin' your way, what hath snuff to say to a lone old cratur' that counts her valley in fardens? The flies, they do tickle, truly. Them and the dogs knows what's good," exclaimed Mrs. Mead, with a glance at the paper parcel. "And doth not the parson say that prosperity draws strange things to it?"

"Ye're allers quizzing, Mrs. Mead. Prosperity, indeed! Five and fourpence was my airnings last week; scarce three loaves in it—thanks to them wagabone

French, as it's a mussy for them I ain't a man."

"Well, and ye give me no news? That two gossips should roast i' this heat with nothing to say! But they're wonderful liars i' Greystone," said Mrs. Mead.

"News—to *thee*!" cried Mrs. Bruff, with a ludicrous toss of the head. "Why, here I stand for the truth; for, as you say, they're dreadful liars i' Greystone."

"The truth o' what?"

"But you know!" exclaimed Mrs. Bruff, looking at her old companion with absurd incredulity in her face.

"I do not know," replied Mrs. Mead, with the eagerness of a born gossip. "I am this minute arrived from Winston, and if anything hath happ'd I'm as strange to it as a unborn infant."

"Why, then," said Mrs. Bruff, speak-

ing slowly, and with evident sense of superiority, "it's everywheres tow'd that Mike Strangfield's wench hath run away for shame o' the wrong done her by Dr. Shaw's son. But that's not it, neither. Not twenty minutes since, I met Deacon Skelton, who says to me, 'Is it true, Mrs. Bruff, that my brother Strangfield is dead?' 'The Lord forbid!' I says. 'I hope not, Mr. Skelton.' 'I'm afeard he is, then,' he says. 'Jim Mason,' he says, 'him as keeps the Blue Posteses, had the news from Tom Raffles, as is cousin to the Strangfields' servint; Polly her name is. She was sent for the doctor, but came fust in a fright to her mother—who's kept her bed sin' April, poor wretch—an' says that Strangfield's fell down in a fit, and's a dead man.' 'Lord bless me, sir!' says I."

"That's news indeed!" exclaimed Mrs.



Mead, very pale, and catching up her dress. "If it's true, it's as strange a visitation as any that iver I read of in Holy Writ. Good-bye to ye. You've put me in a hurry, Mrs. Bruff. Lord save us! what wonderful things happen in this life!"

She was limping rapidly away before Mrs. Bruff could return her farewell.

She was too experienced a gossip herself to believe in the accuracy of any story related; but then, likewise, she well knew that almost never does any story get abroad without foundation. They may say there's a flame where there is only a spark; but, be sure, there is fire of some kind.

Hastily down the street she went, as one with a purpose; but when she came to the market-place the speed of her hobble slackened, she changed her mind,

and walked through the stalls towards her court.

There were a dozen stalls in the market, variously furnished ; but after ten in the morning little business was done, and at this hour of Mrs. Mead's passage through them, their keepers hung lazily among the shadows, talking one to another, while the women knitted or rocked their babies, or, by a new arrangement of fruit and flowers, made a new picture of their wares.

To each and all of these people Mrs. Mead was as familiar an object as any of the pillars that supported the roof of the market. With nods of the head, and amiable answers, she passed them ; until, arriving at the stall that directly faced the court where she dwelt, she stopped to ask a large, bony woman, with a beard, and bare red arms like a smacksman's,

if it was true that Michael Strangfield was dead.

"That I can't tell 'ee, mistress," replied the woman, in a hoarse voice; "there's summat wrong there. If he's dead, I'll treat myself to a dram. An on-civiller brute niver looked a female i' the face. Him it wur as swore me into the stocks two months ago come to-morrow."

"Ay, ay, for bein' in liquor—which was harder upon thy boy Joey than thee."

"Niver was the like o' that lie told sin' Sandy Thomson swore Micky Forward's life away, an' himself the thief! Me in liquor! All my drink is water, wi' a drop o' milk in't at the best."

"Well, kape to that, an' the deacons will do ye no hurt," replied Mrs. Mead. "Can't ye gi' me no more news o' Strangfield?"

"No more than what I've said," answered the woman, sullenly. "D'ye want a pretty cowcumber for three-ha'pence? Here's some here as 'll suit your gums."

"Give me two an' I'll pay ye twopence," exclaimed Mrs. Mead, with a languishing look at the vegetable.

"I'll gi' ye three for sixpence," said the woman.

"Who's to ate of them? Two for twopence, and here's the money."


"Ye knaw how to profit from hard times! If thee wast a parson or a Frenchman ye'd do no worse," grumbled the woman, handing the cucumbers to Mrs. Mead, who paid the twopence, and walked off.

Arrived at her home, she washed her face, brushed her hair, dusted her bonnet and shoes, and, glancing at her cupboard

to make sure of a bit of dinner to be cooked on her return, she sallied forth once more, and walked direct to Strangfield's house.

No outward and visible sign there was of anything being amiss. The men were at work in the yard, and there was an occasional laugh among them as their hammers flashed in the sun, and the saw grated out its harsh song. The loving creepers framed the windows with their peaceful leaves, and the hens crooned in the dust of the path that went between the house and the tarry palings of the yard.

Mrs. Mead knocked softly, and, with an uneasiness bred in her by the dislike bore her by the Strangfields, kept herself close, that she might not be spied by any sideways glance from the window. No one responding, she knocked again



loudly, and presently the door was opened by Mrs. Strangfield herself.

The desolate white and grief of the poor woman's face was indeed something heart-moving to behold. The utter forlornness of the eyes, the piteous droop of the mouth, the dishevelment of hair and attire, which into grief throws a violent dramatic element, were beyond expression. She looked at Mrs. Mead, while the old woman bobbed a curtsy, as a person to whom everything that offers has a meaning cruelly hard to master.

"God forbid, mistress," said Mrs. Mead, "ye should think I am come out of evil curiosity. They say the deacon hath been stricken ill, and positively would I know this from one who hath the truth."

"Why do you come here for news? This is a house of mourning now. I am

a desolate, lonely woman. Heaven help me!" replied Mrs. Strangfield in a broken voice.

"So, indeed, ye be, if it is only for your daughter's leavin' you," said Mrs. Mead, with deep compassion. "But what hath happ'd to the deacon? For the Lord's sake let me hear it of you, ma'am!"

"He hath been struck with paralysis, and lies dying and calling for his daughter. That is the truth. And now must I go to him, for your knock has brought me from his bed, and the maid is away on an errand, and I am alone in the house."

She spoke with the stolidity of exhausted grief, and was stepping back to close the door.

"Stay!" cried Mrs. Mead; "I bring thee news of thy child."

The mother wheeled round with a

shriek, and with both hands seized her arm.


“What of her? Is she living?”

“Living and well. Not an hour ago I left her.”

Mrs. Strangfield had no words. The sudden dispersion of the fears that had torn her heart was a moral convulsion that deprived her of speech. She stood, with her fingers clutching hard the old woman’s arm. Then incoherently she spoke.

“Sweet girl! How hath she been wronged! My pretty one! Alive, indeed, and I have been praying for thee. Oh, what a sorrow to befall the pure in heart! God forgive us!”

She drooped and leaned towards Mrs. Mead, and brought up the old hand to her mouth and kissed it, weeping the while such tears as only mothers weep.



"Alive and well!" she burst out again. "Dear heart, to bring me such tidings! Come in, come in! God is good to send thee! Dear heart, what joy you give me!"

With drops trickling down her furrowed cheeks, Mrs. Mead suffered herself to be drawn into the house by the passionate mother.


"Quick, now, dear friend!" cried Mrs. Strangfield, feverishly. "Tell me where my girl is! Is she in Greystone? . . . Oh, my poor heart!"

"She is at Winston, at the Greyhound there, and you mun go and fetch her, and tell her what blow hath fallen on thee, or she will not retoorn. Oh, she is bitter—and rightly so!" quavered the old woman, in a voice strangely composed of indignation and sympathy. "Niver, she swears, will she come to her home

again, to be despised and thought vilely of. For her dying father she may come—but you must fetch her, mistress.”

“Come! Oh, she will come when she sees my face, and hears that her father lies moaning for her. Besides, hath not Dr. Shaw proved her a married woman? Ay, this very morning, Mrs. Mead, he came to bring us written proof of my Jenny’s marriage with Cuthbert Shaw! But how can I leave my husband?” she cried distractedly. “The doctor says he must be watched. And how can I fetch my Jenny and be with my poor Michael?”

“Well, well! truly proved married! And she hath told no lies, then?” gasped Mrs. Mead. “The Lord forgive ye all for the pain you have given her. What didst thee say?—thy husband wants nursing? While ye’re gone I’ll watch



by him. I've nursed a many i' my time. Hath he his mind?"

"Yes; he lies still—he has no power in one arm—and he groans sadly. He calls for Jenny, and—— Oh, Mrs. Mead! if I am not quick he may never see her again in this world. Dear Mrs. Mead, since you will stop, run up to him now, dear heart, while I get my bonnet. I will be very quick. Do you mind, I have courage to be quick since she is living. Straight up, Mrs. Mead, to the right. Stay, I will show thee. Oh, God grant him a little life!"

She ran upstairs swiftly, yet with light feet, and Mrs. Mead went laboriously, quivering and stumbling after her. Outside the door quite clearly was the groaning of the man heard. He lay on his back, looking towards the wall, and in the gloom of the room his face was scarcely

distinguishable from the pillow for the whiteness of it.

With a finger on her lip, Mrs. Strangfield motioned to Mrs. Mead to take the chair by the bedside ; and, nimbly apparelling herself, she came to the old woman's ear and breathlessly delivered instructions. They were simple enough, and to Mrs. Mead's discretion was left the explanation of her presence if Strangfield should observe her. But truly there seemed little chance of this : never once, since lifted from the parlour floor and laid upon the bed, had he stirred, and that should be over three hours. At regular intervals he groaned, and as his wife glided out of the room he called for Jenny.

CHAPTER X.

JENNY AND HER MOTHER.

"She keeps unbroken
The bond which nature gives."

LONGFELLOW.

Just out of High Street, not a stone's throw from the church, lived Mr. Franklin, who owned the Swiftsure coach that plied between Greystone and the old city on the road to London. Mr. Franklin was the owner of some hackney-coaches as well as the Swiftsure, and a large stable of horses, and out of his special traffic a comfortable living did he get; for in those days balls and routs were no uncommon things on country sides, and

relations were often visiting each other with equipment of luggage; and Franklin was the only hackney jobber in the district.

He was a pudding-faced man, and shaped like a ball in that part of his body which the band of his breeches circled; and he stood, with his legs wide apart, sucking a straw at the gateway of his yard, wherein, under sheds, stood his rolling stock, when Mrs. Strangfield breathlessly came to him, and besought him, with clasped, entreating hands, instantly to order out one of his coaches, that she might be driven to Winston.

Now, fortunately for her, Franklin was a prompt man; and reading urgency in the poor woman's desperate face, he gave a shrill whistle, and out from a little office tumbled a knock-kneed ostler.

“Number Two, Jeremy, and Sarah's

your gal. Let Thomas scrape hisself, and tell him the leddy's waiting," said Mr. Franklin; and with despatch that would pleasure this electric age to experience, a coach rattled up to the gate.

"To the Greyhound, at Winston, as quick as ever you can gallop," cried Mrs. Strangfield; and in a trice the heavy-wheeled vehicle was scattering loungers in the roadway on to the pavements, and making the shop-windows clink to the thunder of its progress.

Still, it was a half-hour's drive, and a terribly hustling one; the ruts sweating steam from the horse, and proving honesty in the traces. Yet the flight of an eagle would have been a snail's pace to the impatience of the mother, who, in her eagerness to recover her child and be back again to her dying husband, sat in a frenzy.

At last the village hove in sight: a little row of cottages swept by, and the coach came to a stand in front of the glass door of the Greyhound Inn. The man descended from the box of the coach, though already she was spraining her wrist in desperate efforts to open the door for herself; and no sooner was she liberated than she flew—into the arms of Sally, who, having caught sight of the coach from a window, was running to the door.

“Are you the mistress?” said Mrs. Strangfield, in a wild way.

“Yes, I be, ma’am,” replied Sally, with a civil curtsy.

“Is there a lady here?”

“Ay; an’ you be her mother, I reckon.”

“I am her mother. Take me to her at once.”

Though Sally had been fortified with a

dozen scruples, they would have been helplessly swept away by the peremptoriness of this command.

“She’s just where Mrs. Mead left her, ma’am. This way, please;” and she went to the parlour door and threw it open, saying, “Here be thy mother, mistress.”

Jenny was standing at the window overlooking the rich green space of garden at the back of the house. With a stupefied face on her she turned, and a cry left her lips, and she stepped back a pace when her mother rushed to her. Then, like a flash of light, at the sight of the beloved face, an impulse of love and joy leapt up in her; and in close sobbing embrace were they locked as Sally, looking away from the sacred sight, closed the door upon them.

“Oh, Jenny, why are you here? why

didst thee leave me ? ” cried Mrs. Strangfield, relinquishing her daughter to gaze at her, with eyes in which rapture and sorrow were strangely blended. “ Never was mother’s heart wrung as mine was when this morning I beheld your bed untouched, and you were not near to answer to my call.”

“ I could not stay. Father would have taken me to London to-day ; and see what a mad journey it would have been, and how cruel my ignorance would make him ! ” the girl said, pushing back her hair, and standing in a half-defiant, half-drooping posture before her mother.

“ Thy father ! Oh, Jenny ! not only is it my love for thee that has brought me here in mad haste—thy father is dying ! Ay, he may be dead before we can return to him ! ”

“ Dying ! . . . Mother, what do you

say?" said Jenny, taking, so to speak, a firmer hold of the floor with her feet, and frowning, whilst a sickly hue of pallor overspread her face.

"Oh, Jenny! for the sake of God who hath brought me to thee, put on your hat and come with me quickly. I tell you your father is dying—he fell to the ground when Dr. Shaw brought him proof of your marriage with Cuthbert. Dost thee not know that the doctor has proved thee his son's wife? Ah, my poor heart, how should she know!—and that the cause of thy husband's missing, as the doctor believes, is that he was seized by the press-gang and carried away to sea! Down thy father fell, and we bore him to his room, and the surgeon fears for his life; and all the while he lies groaning and crying upon thy name. *'Bring Jenny to me! bring Jenny to me!'*

he moans. My pretty, come quickly, or you'll see him no more in this world."

The girl stood transfixed and overwhelmed by her mother's news. Then you could have seen her battling with the rush and surge of tumultuous emotions a whole minute ere she spoke.

"Do you tell me that my darling is carried away to sea?" she said, in a febrile whisper.

"'Tis what his father believes."

"And that Dr. Shaw hath proved me his son's wife to my father?"

"Yes, indeed. He came with a paper, and the sight of it hath killed thy father. His heart is broken for the wrong he has done his only one!" wailed the mother. "Oh, Jenny, do not delay! There is a coach at the door. Make haste to put on your hat. You would not let him be moaning for thee in dying sorrow, and not come!"

She looked at her mother with a wonderful expression of troubled amazement and incredulous horror in her eyes, then took up her hat, and in a few minutes was ready to depart. As she left the room, she met Mrs. Walker, into whose hand she slipped a guinea, giving her a sweet, strange smile as she did so, but quite powerless to speak.


The woman, much affected by Jenny's munificence, put the little trunk into the coach, and low and numerous were the curtsies she dropped as it drove off.

The rattle of wheel and window, if not a prohibition to speech, was a decided obstacle to the hearing. But Mrs. Strangfield had too much to say to hold her peace. With her child's hand locked in hers, she poured her heart into Jenny's ear, and all the story of Dr. Shaw's visit told her, and the medical man's judgment

on Michael's condition, with whatever else that her head was giddy with—sometimes reproaching and sometimes breaking into passionate exclamations of rapture, which thoughts of her husband would inevitably choke; silent scarcely ever, and of the matter of her volubility leaving Jenny, amid the roar of the coach, in possession of but very small fragments.

And the girl?

Her father knew at last that she was honest, and for a brief while had exultation, of the kind that enflames the madman's eye, swelled until it had sickened her heart with the force and fulness of it. But the emotion died under the heavy droop of humiliated honour. She had won back her name, but what had the victory cost her? Her husband was gone, her father was dying, her heart was wounded and bleeding badly. To her very



mother her instincts moved rebelliously, for even in *her* implicit faith had been wanting; and as perfume is got from flowers by crushing them, so surely had the girl's heart been cruelly used, that the truth might be torn from it.

The bitter passion of shame that had driven her from Greystone revisited her again when the coach entered the High Street, and she leaned back and involuntarily drew her veil over her face. The mother noticed the action, but had no sympathy to comprehend its import. To *her* belief it was fear of father that had caused Jenny's flight; and now that home was near, the dreadful terror that Michael was gone into eternity without forgiveness from the child he had wronged, dried up the wife's tongue and held her solemnly mute.


She stopped the coach at the corner of

the street, that the jar of the wheels might not penetrate the resonant wooden house, and alighted with her daughter, and both of them went quickly in.

“Mother,” whispered Jenny, standing in the passage as a stranger might, “I will stay here till you have seen him.”

“In the parlour, then, dearest, and rest thee. Oh, Jenny, pray God to spare him ! He is thy father.”

Softly the poor woman climbed the stairs, and Jenny went into the little room which, in all her life, she had vowed never again to enter. Speculating she stood, wondering how it had befallen that her mother had come so speedily, and if Mrs. Mead had arrived straight from Winston to break her promise ; with an under-current of breathless expectation in her mind, quite apart from her other thoughts, that amid her conjectures held her listen-



ing painfully and drawing the air with labour and short struggles.

Then through the doorway came a whisper—"Jenny!"

She went out, and on the stairs she saw her mother, who for despair could only beckon or toss her hands. She followed Mrs. Strangfield upstairs, with a creeping chill over her limbs, and the sensation of a thousand quivering fibres in her body.

In the bedroom, near the bed, were two figures, whom she could not immediately distinguish for the feeble light in the chamber; but she speedily found that one was Mrs. Mead, and the other the doctor—a square man, in a long-skirted coat and buckles on his shoes, and a brown wig glossily shining over a face whereof the pensive concern was as clearly a part as any lineament.

Both figures drew away when mother

and daughter came into the room. Mrs. Strangfield went to the bedside, and, bending over the motionless form upon it, said, in a whisper of exquisite sadness—

“Michael, Jenny is here. Wilt thou speak to her?”

For some moments there was no answer. At last, in a faint, hoarse murmur, the dying man said—

“Let her take my hand and kiss me. Jane, thee knowest that I cannot move.”

The girl went to her father, and put her hand into his and kissed his forehead.

“Jenny, my little one,” he murmured, “thee didst wrong to trick me. Of old did the prophet chide, saying, ‘And thou saidst, I shall be a lady for ever: so that thou didst not lay these things to thy heart, neither didst remember the latter end of it.’ But thy punishment has been

sore, my poor one. By thee am I condemned, whom I condemned. I was a liar for speaking what, in my wrath, I believed the truth; and it did nearly break thy heart, poor wench, as mine is broken!"

No pathos the meaning of his words had could equal the deeply moving effect given to them, by his speaking with his head turned away, all power lost, life ebbing from him as surely as the shadows cast by the sun were slowly circling to the east, whence darkness comes. She hung over him with dry eyes, for the grief in her was too deep for tears.

"Father," she whispered, "I wronged thee by loving secretly; but has not my husband's going wrung my heart with punishment enough? Truly I was innocent of worse sin than deceit; and now that you know I am innocent, and bear

with my kisses, I could be happy to die."

No answer did he return, and he began to breathe heavily; on which the doctor came gently to her, and would have led her from the bed; but the father had a grip of her hand, and she would not disengage his hold.

Said the mother, in a feeble whisper—

"Is there no hope?"

The doctor shook his head, and let his chin fall on his breast, and stood quiet, with his hands clasped.

No more was said.

What was killing him, God knows! Not paralysis only, nor yet a broken heart. Yet visibly was he dying, and the difficult breath grew slower and weaker; and within an hour from Jenny's return to her home, the breath in him was gone, and the body growing cold. He passed

away, amid a deep stillness in the room ; and Jenny herself, who was near him, knew not that he was dead, until a strangeness in the hold of his fingers made her shriek out.

Thus did it come about ; and the mother and daughter wept in each other's arms, while the doctor glided noiselessly from the house, and Mrs. Mead tenderly closed the dead man's eyes, and veiled the marble silence of his face.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE CITY.

“ . . . This soul hath been
Alone on a wide, wide sea ;
So lonely 'twas that God Himself
Scarce seemèd there to be.”

COLERIDGE.


Now, it was just five months after Michael Strangfield had departed this life, which brings us into the sloppy, inglorious month of November, that there hung over London, close down to the streets, a yellow fog.

So thick was it, that a man, standing still in any thoroughfare, found life strangely converted into a mere pulsa-

tion of phantoms ; a brief emergence and abrupt vanishment of figures—of men and women and horses—silent for the most part with the bewilderment of the shroud of fog.

All about the Monument, and where a maze of streets meets, to pour their crowds towards London Bridge, the fog was thickest, smothering the business of the hour, as though the heavens had come down upon mankind in the form of a feather-bed. Here were many vehicles at a standstill, and voices belonging to invisible creatures went through the fog, with the clang of bells and stamping and slipping of iron-shod feet.

A hackney-coachman, swathed in a mass of capes, and looking, with the immense white shawl around his throat, like an artichoke trimmed with sauce, suddenly brought the horse he had been



pulling and hauling at to a stand, and, slapping down his whip on the roof of the vehicle, leaned over and shouted into the window—

“There’s no movin’ agin it. You can git out or sit vere you are ; but here I stops !”

And, saying this, he recovered his upright posture, and with great deliberation folded his arms under his cape.

The individual thus addressed, protruding his head through the window of the carriage, took a despairing look at the blank scene around, filled with outlines which grew defined or vanished, as the folds of the fog circled or released them.

“Whereabouts are we, coachman ?” he called out.

“If I knew I’d go ahead, and blow the odds !” replied the man.

But the gentleman inside was clearly

too impatient to behave sensibly ; for, catching hold of a travelling-bag, he jumped into the middle of the fog, and, giving some money to the coachman, went steadily in the direction to which his nose happened to point ; and, luck being with him, he came to the pavement.

He asked a man the way to Cornhill. "Straight on," was the reply. And after twenty minutes of bumping and groping, and when he had measured some two hundred yards, the fog lifted, the whole space and scene around cleared, and with a rush and a shout London went to work again.

It was a short walk to Cornhill. Looking carefully from side to side as he went, our friend arrived presently at a passage, on which, amid other names, carefully indicated by a pointing hand, was the

scroll, "George Hunter and Company, Second Floor." He mounted the gloomy staircase, and reached a landing of four doors, on one of which he knocked.

Behind a tall, long desk were several clerks writing by lamplight.

"I wish," said the gentleman, "to see the principal—the owner of the ship *Elizabeth*."

At the sound of that name the whole of the clerks looked up like one man and stared at him.

"Certainly," exclaimed one of them, jumping up. "What name, if you please, sir?"

"Mr. Cuthbert Shaw."

The clerk passed into another office, and in a moment returned and requested Mr. Shaw to walk in. This was done by passing round the desk; and Cuthbert, followed by the eyes of all the clerks,

entered a large office, where at a table sat two elderly gentlemen.

One of them, a grey-haired man with spectacles, immediately rose.

“Mr. Shaw, I think the name was?”

“Mr. Cuthbert Shaw.”

“Pray take that chair, sir. My partner, Mr. Atkinson. My name is Hunter.”

He resumed his seat, looking inquisitively at the brown, though emaciated, face of the young man.

“It is possible, Mr. Hunter, that you may have already been apprized of the loss of your ship the *Elizabeth*, off Cape Palmas?”

“Yes; but only one week since, by the third mate of the vessel, who was rescued from a boat, with four companions.”


“I was on board the *Elizabeth* when she was wrecked, and am only just arrived in London.”

“Cuthbert Shaw? I do not remember the name in the list of passengers,” said Mr. Hunter. “I will refer——” and he was about to summon a clerk.

“You will not find my name in your list. I was rescued by the *Elizabeth* in the English Channel last July, a day or two after she sailed from the Thames. I was on board an English brig of war called the *Cleopatra*. She engaged a French frigate, and was sunk by her. Some of us got clear of the sinking hull by means of the boats, and, on the following day, the *Elizabeth* came across the boat I was in and took me on board.

“Permit me to continue my story, and relate the object of my visit. My time is very short in London.

“All had gone prosperously with the *Elizabeth* until we were drawing near the latitude of the Gulf of Guinea;



when, one Friday evening, a furious gale set in from the west. It obliged us to run before it, and for a whole day we were driven helplessly; but, on Saturday night, the captain, not daring to run to the westward any longer, hove the ship to, in doing which she was struck by a sea that swept away the galley, stove in the bulwarks, and carried some of the men overboard. At the same time we lost one of our masts.

“Gentlemen, you will probably have received a full account of this disaster from the mate. It is enough if I tell you that, on the Monday morning, finding the ship leaking beyond our power to keep her afloat, the men took to the boats; but I was in feeble health, and, in the selfish rush, I was beaten down and left insensible, and for a quarter of an hour I lay: when coming to, I found there was

another man left on board—one of the Indian prince's attendants. I sprang up, and halloed after the boats, which were sailing rapidly away—the gale had broken on the previous afternoon, and the sea was comparatively smooth, if I take no account of the heavy swell—and then, perceiving that the ship was rapidly sinking, and the occupants of the boats either did not or would not heed me, I prepared myself for death—which, God knows, at that time had no terrors for me, for I had endured more than many hearts could have stood without breaking under.”

Observing the pause, Mr. Hunter produced a bottle of wine from a drawer and filled a glass for the young fellow. With kindly eyes and much sympathy he encouraged him to proceed.

“Gentlemen, whilst I stood awaiting the moment of death, which I conceived

inevitable, the Indian, appearing to observe me for the first time, rushed up to me and, with many wild gesticulations and unintelligible words, dragged me to the stern of the vessel, where, to my joy, I saw a small boat suspended. She hung by ropes at the head and stern, and I motioned to the Indian to slacken the left-hand rope whilst I released the other, by which means we got the boat down upon the water without capsizing her.


“No sooner was she afloat, than the Indian sprang over the taffrail and swung himself into her; and, dreading that he might leave me to my fate, I followed him hastily, and cast the boat adrift from the ship, which, twenty minutes after we had quitted her, sank.

“From this point my story is a mere commonplace narrative of suffering, with

one strange feature in it. Our boat was without sails. The other boats, having the advantage over us in size and sail, soon vanished upon the water-line."

He glanced at a timepiece, drank his wine, and continued, speaking quickly—

"There was a small quantity of fresh water in a beaker in the boat's bows, but no food of any kind. In the night, which was very calm, with bright stars, I fell asleep; and when I awoke, my mouth being parched, I went to the beaker, but found it empty. I knew that the Indian had drank the water in the night whilst I slept, and, in my rage and agony, I could have murdered him; but the wretch fell on his knees and so piteously moaned to me in his native language, that my fury was sobered by the fear and despair in his face, and in my misery I sat down and wept. Observing my anguish, the



Indian crawled over to me on his knees and kissed my feet, and then, pulling out a package from his breast, he placed it in my hand and withdrew to the bows of the boat. Scarcely knowing what I did, I thrust the package into my pocket, and instantly forgot it in the sufferings of thirst which tormented me. However, some relief I obtained by sousing my shirt in the sea and wearing it against my skin; and likewise I chewed a piece of leather from the sole of my boot, which kept my mouth moist.

“Four days passed, in sufferings I need not describe, and on the fifth day the Indian fell crazy, and, leaning over the side of the boat in a manner that nearly upset her, he drank the salt water greedily as a sheep would, with his mouth upon it, which brought on a black vomit, and towards the morning he died. Not

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*...that had wrecked the Elizabeth
many miles out of her course, who on
sighting my boat bore down and picked
me up. That was on the 12th of Sep-
tember, as I was told—for I had lost all
reckoning of time—and four days ago I
arrived at Portsmouth. So this brings
me to an end of my perils, gentlemen;
and now will I state my motive in calling
upon you."*

He put his hand in his pocket, and held it there while he spoke.

"You of course remember that an Indian prince sailed as passenger in the *Elizabeth*?"

"Certainly."

"He was reported on board the ship to be possessed of very valuable jewels."



“We will give you the appraisement in figures—£170,000.”

“I have explained to you that my fellow-sufferer in the boat was one of the Prince’s attendants. The parcel he placed in my hands contained precious stones, which a jeweller in Portsmouth valued at £63,000.”

“He must have stolen them when the ship was sinking,” said Mr. Hunter, quickly.

“No doubt, and by so doing saved them. Here they are, in the wrapper in which they were handed to me.”

Saying which, he placed the package on the table. Mr. Hunter took it up and opened it, and his partner drew close to him; and when the gems lay exposed, his eyes glistened in the light of them.

Splendid stones some of them were, truly: diamonds chiefly, with the lustrous


until the evening of the sixth day was I rescued by a small schooner from Pernambuco to Portsmouth, blown by the gale that had wrecked the *Elizabeth* many miles out of her course, who on sighting my boat bore down and picked me up. That was on the 12th of September, as I was told—for I had lost all reckoning of time—and four days ago I arrived at Portsmouth. So this brings me to an end of my perils, gentlemen ; and now will I state my motive in calling upon you.”

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Splendid stones some of them were, truly: diamonds chiefly, with the lustrous

red of rubies intermixed, and here and there the mild shimmer of a pearl. It was hard to tell whether the gems had been extracted from settings or gathered loose as they were ; but an ignorant eye might know their preciousness.

“ Well, Mr. Shaw,” said Mr. Hunter, placing the open paper carefully on the table, with a gentle setting of it towards Cuthbert, “ these stones are unquestionably your property, and well may you hold them, in compensation for the sufferings you have undergone.”

“ Well, sir, it comes to this : if they were not on that table, they would be at the bottom of the sea.”

“ Quite so,” from both partners.

“ Now, gentlemen, you cannot tell me that the prince is alive ? ”

“ That is beyond our power, certainly.”

“ Will you put yourselves in his place,

and receive the proposals I should make to him ? ”

“ With pleasure ; but, holding him dead, we will consider your proposal in reference to his heirs,” said Mr. Hunter.

“ That is as you please. Sixty-three thousand pounds is a jeweller’s appraisal of those stones. He would have found me the money. I ask ten thousand pounds for restoring them.”

“ Plainly, Mr. Shaw, your Portsmouth jeweller taught you no lesson,” said Mr. Hunter ; and the other partner arched his eyebrows.

“ Be open with me, gentlemen.”

“ Why, sir, we consider your request a very modest one.”

“ Then what I will ask you to do is this : give me a letter stating that you hold these stones for me ; get them appraised at your convenience. I will write

to you in the meanwhile, giving you my address, and you will then send me bank-post-bills to cover the sum I ask."

The letter was written, the number of stones specified, and within the space of twenty minutes Culthbert had left the office.

Both parties shook him cordially by the hand, and Mr. Hunter attended him, bare-headed, to the door.

It was a rich morning's work for them ; for in those days "commission" was as keenly understood in the City of London as now.

CHAPTER XII.

CUTHBERT.

“ Now I am comen home to reste.”

Sir John Mandeville.

BRONZED by the sun and thin in the face.

But emaciation was the only change in him.

And it was a change to mar nothing of his beauty, which, because of the ingrained expression of pensive thought, such as a man might wear in whose heart sorrow languishes but will not die, was of a noble and truer type than

what it had been in the lighter months before.

When a man lives a bitter lifetime in a short while, his face will be a mirror to reflect the violent compression of experience.

By the earnest, plaintive gaze of the eye, by the habitual fixity of the mouth, by the unsevere resolution of feature, Cuthbert explained to the shallowest sight the harshness of his ordeal, though its nature remained his secret.

But to this distinctive expression which his face had taken—stamped there by lonely contemplation, by unutterable longings, by helpless chafing, by many fits of mental agony, by hope fallen sick and spiritless, by such things which do really and truly of this life make a hell without participation of conscience, as there are sufferers to swear—was super-

added at this time, as he walked through busy thoroughfares, a painful anxiety so acute as to fix upon his heart the shadow of physical torment.

With quick steps he pressed forward, glancing on his passage at every clock, until he had crossed Blackfriars Bridge, and arrived at the famous hostelry which, in those days, was the starting-point for the coaches to that part of the coast where Greystone lay.


Here was the coach drawn up, and passengers clambering to their places, and another five minutes of fog had lost the returned hero a night.

There was room and to spare, happily ; but no time for the hot drink, which the rest of the travellers had stowed under their small-clothes. Vapour was still in the sky to darken it, and a leaden dulness on the massive city ; but when the horses'

heads were down, and the wheels spinning, the sky grew light, and fold after fold of fog peeled off until the blue heaven floated clear, and then the tune of the wind grew merry.

This coach was the "Rattler," and famous for good runs. At every stage did it halt, as punctually as trains at stations do now; and for a careless heart the passage was a glorious journey to make. November's yellow light upon the land, upon the hill-tops a full-toned colouring that kept distant the blue of the sky, between the ridges masses of shadow, the brown of loam, and the dwelling of sunshine on green.

At eight of the evening the coach swung through the streets of a half-way city of the road, where some relinquished the roof for an inn-fire and a bed. But Cuthbert kept his place; so that faith-



fully at the hour of twelve, by the deep-voiced city clock, the coach arrived at that ancient place whence diverged the road to Greystone, and here Cuthbert quitted the vehicle.


The suggestion of a bed seemed like a landlord's mocking of a restless spirit; yet to a bed in the Old Bell Inn he betook himself, laying urgent commands upon the host that a post-chaise should be ready for him by six. Even an hour's sleep could do him no injury; and this he got, which relieved the veins of his head from the fulness of the blood poured into them by intense mental anxiety, and toned the heart into a softer beating; so that when he was aroused he was better prepared for the end of his journey.

The distance to Greystone was twenty-one miles, and this the post-horses could run, with one halt for a bait. At nine

o'clock the chaise-wheels took the stones of the High Street.

He was in Greystone at last; amid the familiar scenes that had been present to him in vigils which had made his eyes a torture to his head for the heat of them, in the frightful loneliness of the deep, in the hour of battle, in the shrieking time of shipwreck, in the long and crushing pause of idleness forced upon him by the tardy movements of the little ship that had brought him home.

In Greystone at last! And as in the High Street he stood, the smooth sea stretching its grey lustre to the sky from under the fronting houses, and the keen wind whitening the roadways—unnoticed, for the cold, by the few persons abroad, who hurried past, hugging themselves in folds of frieze—a passionate fear came upon him and held him to the pavement.



For right in his sight, looking now through bare tendrils of creepers, was the shipwright's wooden house ; and that it might be a desolate place for the want of his wife, and a tomb for the echoes of memory only to sound in, was a dread of the awful kind that repels the heart with horror from the determination of it.

He took courage presently and went forward slowly, with his eyes fixed upon the house, until he was at the gate of it, and then he walked quietly to the door. He knocked and fell back a pace, that every window might be visible to him ; and whilst he stood, looking first here and then there, the door was opened, and a respectably dressed woman stood forth.

He could barely speak for the constriction in his throat, and in a quite faint voice asked if Mrs. Strangfield was within.

“ Oh, dear no, sir. Mrs. Strangfield

has been gone these three months," answered the woman, looking at him with surprise.

"Where?"

"Why, to a house in Winston. Do not you know her husband be dead, and the business sold to Mr. McAndrew?"

"They were friends of mine, and I am just returned from a long journey." And in a wild, quick way, like a cry overleaping decision, he said, "And what of her daughter?"

"Mrs. Shaw? She lives along wi' her mother. Her husband be dead too, ye know."

"She lives with her mother, and is well, I hope?" he said, the flush brought to his face by the violence his question did him yielding to a deadly white.

"Quite well, I believe, sir. She's niver i' Greystone. They say she's known a

deal o' sorrow, and there's some shame in it that keeps her i' hiding. Poor heart! A sweeter woman there is not; truly there is not."

She looked at him hard as she said this, the gaze growing keener and keener, the eyebrows lifting to it, and something like an expression of consternation coming into her face.

"I am Mr. Shaw," he said, anticipating the question that was already parting her lips.

"You!—an' she thinks ye dead!" the woman shrieked.

With a toss of the hands he turned his head to look up the High Street.

"Is it known," he said, confronting her, "that I was impressed in error by a gang of sailors? What did my father think? Do you know him?"

"Dr. Shaw, of the school-house? Well

by name, sir. Ye know, of course, that he be well, and is giving up teachin' ? A man hath come from some city i' the north to buy the school from him—so I heerd but a week since," said the woman, so fascinated, not alone by the romance of Cuthbert's return, but by the beauty of his face, that she could not lift her eyes from him.

"Is it known that I was impressed ? " he asked again.

"I cannot tell ye for sure, sir. Some talk there was, I think ; but them as it went among were but little known to me. And before my husband bought this business we lived at the white house, away down by Callow Bay, which kept me out o' gossip."

"Is Mr. Franklin alive ? or, where can I hire a coach ? "

"Oh, Mr. Franklin is nicely, sir. Will

ye not come in and sit down? And my gel shall fetch you a coach as quick as iver it'll come for thee."

He thanked her for her civil offer and entered the little parlour, never before beheld by him, and even unfamiliar to us, now that the quaint furniture of the Strangfields was gone, and the simple old sea-pieces.

He breathed quickly as he stood alone, looking around him. This had been his darling's home. Through the window, into which Mr. McAndrew had let clarified glass, he saw the old bay tree, and the shrubbery and green stuff, amid which he used to slip his letters to his sweetheart after dark, appointing meetings for the morrow. The walls around him had echoed to her voice. Her feet had trodden the ground on which he stood. Yonder was the scene of street and market-place,

which her timid eyes had swept again and again that night when she waited for him to come and tell her father that she was his wife.

Mrs. McAndrew returned with a tray of wine and biscuit, and pulled a chair to the table that he should sit.

“I’m all of a tremble with astonishment, sir, truly. ’Tis the wonderfulest thing that ye should be there looking at me, and your pretty wife thinking herself a widow, not five mile away. I’ve sent the gel for a carriage. Ye’ll have patience for five minutes, sir; and if this wine’s not to your relish, I can draw ye a proper head o’ beer.”

He seated himself, looking vacantly at the woman under his lowering brow.

“You cannot tell me that my wife *knew* that I was carried away to sea by a press-gang?” he said presently.

“I can’t own as iver I heard say she knew it, sir. But I can tell you that some trouble came upon the sweetheart after ye were missing; her father was cruel, and that she were married he would not believe. That’s what were said. Then afterwards it were proved by Dr. Shaw she was your wife, sir. And that broke her father’s heart, they said. One thing I reckon sure, howiver wrong be all else I say: your wife ran away from Greystone for the shame that evil-thinking gossips put upon her; and her mother, as she now lives with, told me herself that her reason for sellin’ the business was because Mistress Shaw had vowed niver to come to Greystone again, after she had kissed her father, lying dead on his bed for grief.”

“May God forgive them all for wronging her! Poor little one! Could her

father look at her and doubt her? Oh, madam, the carriage is a long while coming. This delay is a heavy trial to me ! ”

He went quickly from his chair to the window, where he stood a while, tapping the ground with his foot.

“ How did my father treat her, do you know ? ” he asked.

“ Why, sir, very honourably, I believe, from all reports. An old Mrs. Mead, whom some call ‘ mother,’ was telling me a while back, that your father asked Mistress Shaw to go and live with him, promising to pack the boys home and give up the trade if she’d come. But your lady hath a proper spirit, and Mrs. Mead, who loves her, said, ‘ How should she stay with the old man as doubted her honour once ? ’ Though I’ll own I answered her, that, all things considering,

seeing your lady could not prove her marriage, as 'twas said, and that you were not by, it was not what you might call onraisonable for Dr. Shaw to doubt her."

"Not prove her marriage!"

He dropped his head and swung himself to the window, exclaiming under his breath, "That was my fear, always."

"Well, sir," continued Mrs. McAndrew, "ye see, accordin' to Mrs. Mead, it were this: ye had charge o' the marriage paper, and the mistress could not remember the name o' the church in London. As how should she, if it were ne'er told her? Once in all my life was I in London, and dazed was I by the noise, to be sure—in some streets 'twas like a bull roaring—and though my cousin, who is a London man, showed me a score o' churches, and named 'em, too, clear in my hearing, not if you was to say, here

be a hundred pounds for thee, if ye'll gi' me the name o'—— ”


But before she could make an end the hackney-coach came rumbling to the gate, with the maid inside it. Thanking her for her civility and information, and learning from her that “onybody i' Winston 'll tell ye where Mrs. Strangfield lives,” Cuthbert shook Mrs. McAndrew's hand, jumped into the coach, and was driven off.

CHAPTER XIII.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

“But seas between us braid hae roar’d
Sin’ Auld Lang Syne.”

It was a bright day, but the wind very keen, and the country white-looking for it, though there was no frost. From side to side Cuthbert’s eyes roamed as the coach rattled him up the High Street, but no familiar face did he encounter. Yes! one there was—an old boatman, who stood sucking a pipe at the door of an ale-house. Always, when Cuthbert went fishing, this was the man who had



rowed him out to sea. He was past in a moment, and out of the High Street rolled the coach on to the level country road. And now, by changing his seat, might Cuthbert have caught a glimpse, on his right hand, of the roof and chimney-pots of Greystone School. But he did not change his seat, nor turn his head, nor give his father a thought. That his father was well was news to satisfy into silence the faint filial instinct that stirred in him. Why, it was his own foolish silence, and the trick of a secret marriage, that had brought the shame of scandal upon his wife ; but, pricked by memory of the cold restraint that had kept him a boy when he was a man, he would have been an angel not to refer all his own and Jenny's sorrow to his father.

With his arms folded tightly upon his breast, and all his heart given to violent

strife with dismaying emotion, and the terror of great love, wrought by expectation and hope to the extreme point where other passions begin, Cuthbert was carried at a sharp trot along the hard road, and over the ruts which the cold had congealed into iron; past the brown land of fields and leafless hedgerows, where balls of birds perched without flutter; and the steam from the horse's nostrils drove out from either side the coach like throbs of an escape-pipe under the hammering of a cylinder.

At last came up a grey stone front, with green ivy flourishing upon it, and the wheels rang out a multiplied echo.

Cuthbert called to the man to stop.

“This is Winston?”

“Ay, sir.”

“I’ll get out here.”

He alighted with his travelling-bag,



and put money into the driver's hand, which set the fellow groping for change, until he found the passenger walking away.

A man was standing at the door of the Greyhound Inn. He touched his cap to Cuthbert, thinking him a customer for Sally; for this was Mr. Walker.

"Will you please direct me to Mrs. Strangfield's house?" said Cuthbert.

"You can see him from here, sir. Come vheer I stand. There; him with the top window built out. I reckon the old lady's seein' company to-day," exclaimed Mr. Walker.

"Who is there?" inquired Cuthbert, quickly.

"Well, the little schoolmaster from Greystone's there; and then there's yer-self, master. One an' one maketh two; that's company for Winston. An' if it

warn't for my garden-stoof, the Lord help my landlord ! ”

“ Is Mrs. Shaw there ? ”


“ Ay, day an' night,” answered Mr. Walker, taking a close look at the speaker at this.

Cuthbert noticed the glance, and went forward.

The house stood back from the lane, with a space of twenty feet or so of garden before it. A big and pretty country cottage, with the old equipment of porch and eaves, and bay-windows trenching upon the oval plot of grass.

When he was at the gate of it, the hammering of his heart confused his head, and for some moments he stood unable to advance, hidden by the railing and the impenetrable tangle of evergreen within.

Courage came to him then, and with a




swing of the body he passed through the gate and struck the door.

It was opened by Mrs. Strangfield herself. He knew her instantly, and she him. But wonderful it was to behold in her face the stupefaction of surprise, yielding to incredulity and fear, then to prodigious doubt, then to a light of wild rapture.

In a breathless voice : “ Cuthbert Shaw ! Oh, Jenny ! Oh, my darling ! it is well with thee at last ! it is well with thee at last ! ” and her hands fell upon his arm, and she drew him in.

“ Where is she ? ” he exclaimed, lowering his voice to a whisper. “ Break the news to her gently. She thinks me dead, I hear. Is that room empty ? Hush ! I think I hear her.”

He drew a fierce, short breath, and on tiptoe stole into a room on the left of the



hall, beckoning to Mrs. Strangfield to follow him.

The poor woman closed the door, and with her back against it stared at him as though the ideas his presence gave her were not to be mastered.

“Is she well—quite well?” he asked.

“Oh yes, Mr. Shaw, she is well. Dear heart! how wonderful to see thee! Ay, is she well. But, pretty dear one, God knows she has suffered for thee! Truly she thinks you dead! Were not you in a ship that was sunk? Alack! but a minute ago you were drowned, and now are you here! Oh, my head! my head! Why, who is with Jenny now, but thy very own father! Often doth he come to see his daughter—for that is she now to him, and so he terms her, and truly loves her. Oh, Mr. Shaw, what will she say to hear of you—to see you!”

Her excitement was past weeping. She was distracted by the sight of him, and could not yet believe her senses.

“Mrs. Strangfield, pray go to her at once, and tell her I am here. Go, I beseech you. I *cannot* endure delay.”

And saying this he went to the door, from which she drew away, and held it open, and she passed out.

Now in the adjacent room, toasting his feet at the fire, and his frill showing frostily upon his breast, in contrast with the ruby light from the grate, sat Dr. Shaw, snuff-box in hand, cosily nursing his figure in a good armchair. Facing him sat Jenny, in deep mourning, her pale loveliness taking from dejection and the sombreness of her apparel a fine and unapproachable delicacy.


Her hands were upon her lap, and her head drooping, and in that pose she

listened to Dr. Shaw, who was explaining to her the offer he had that morning received for the transfer of his school.

It was easy to see, from the manner in which he addressed her and the expression in the eyes that he bent on her, that she had made her way to his heart, and was, indeed, to his soul what he named her with his lips—daughter.

Otherwise it was not in nature that it should have been. He was a lonely old man now, for whom his calling held no more relish; quite friendless in Greystone, with an ever-present ache in his heart which his proud face might dissemble, but which ruled his conduct.

This had brought him to the tender girl whose honour he had once rudely doubted; and she, for the love she bore his son, had given him her love, and he had no happiness away from her.



Thus they sat, and he was telling her that he should accept the offer made him, when Mrs. Strangfield came in.

Jenny turned in her chair to look at her.

“Mother!” she cried, jumping up, “what is it?—who has come? Is it bad news? You are ill!”

“Oh, Jenny! Oh, Dr. Shaw! be seated, dear heart!” exclaimed the poor woman, involuntarily wringing her hands in her desperation; for the news she had to deliver was like a load heaped upon her back, above her power to support, and she reeled and trembled under it. “Something most wonderful—oh, how shall I tell it you?—something God hath done to make us merry! Oh, my darling, come to me!”

She held out her hands; but Jenny, leaning on the back of her chair, stood

motionlessly surveying her, and the blood came and went in her face like the shadow of clouds on moonlit land.

“Mother,” she said in a deep whisper, “speak! What hath God done for us?”

The doctor had left his armchair, and was peering with a pale face at Mrs. Strangfield.

“Is it—is it Cuthbert?” he said.

“Ay, as the Lord is just, he is here! Jenny, he is here!” the mother shrieked.

The girl stared at her mother with eyes that looked beyond her. She moved, but fell back again with her hand upon the chair, and turned her eyes upon the doctor, and then gave a wild, hysterical cry.

“She hath a brave heart, and will meet him bravely!” wailed poor Mrs. Strangfield; and opening the door, she cried, “Mr. Shaw! come to your wife—she is waiting for thee.”

Cuthbert crossed the hall, and stood at the open door. Eyes for his wife only had he. Their glances met, and with the gladdest, maddest cry that ever rung from a woman's lips, she fled to him.

Dr. Shaw fell, with his face in his hands upon the table, and wept.

Of all violent shocks sudden joy is the hardest to bear. Great grief, dreadful calamity, oppression tragical and crushing mercifully will make stone of the heart it falls upon; but joy finds the heart living, and sore and tender, and its blow may well kill.

The wonder of love was in Jenny's actions: the quick cries, the passionate clinging, the sudden release, the mad and laughing closing again, the crazy frown of bewilderment, the glorious illumination of conviction—these were hers.


Piteously sobbed Mrs. Strangfield be-

hind, with restless strides making little pluckings at her daughter, as if to stay the excesses of this distemper of bliss; until a kind of silence fell, and the wife, with heavenly consciousness upon her, lay in her husband's arms—peaceful and beautiful and smiling.

“Cuthbert,” cried Dr. Shaw, suddenly lifting his face from his hands, “is it not my turn?”

“Kiss him, my darling one—kiss him,” Jenny said, and stood firm, to ease his support of her. “He loves me as thy wife, and—oh, mother! how good is Almighty God!”

Father and son met in close embrace; but there was sadness in the sight of the old man's trembling, the passionate play of feature which the pride of Satan could not have restrained under the inexorable dictation of natural emotion; and when



their arms fell to their sides, the doctor turned to a chair, and dropped upon his knees before it and said—

“Master, as Thou didst teach, so now I say, giving thanks : For that my son is ever with me, and all that I have is his. It is meet that we should make merry and be glad : for my son was dead and is alive again ; and was lost, and is found.”

And so saying he arose, and there was tranquillity and joy in his face.

Such a meeting as this makes amends ; and the story of sufferings endured and hopes delayed, and the fears and the bitter convictions arising, shall be told with kisses and smiles and sighs.

Cuthbert shall relate how by shipwreck he made his fortune, and wonder shall unfold all the deeper beauties of his darling's eyes.

The doctor shall tell his story. The mother hers.

And, over and over again, the wife her story, claiming for her one old friend, the ancient gossip Mead, the affection and the gratitude of her husband, and a more shining tribute of his respect withal—as who needs to be told?—while the darkness of the November afternoon gathers around, and shadows swarm in the fire-play, and the spell of winter holds the world pale and still outside.

This must be. Yet is there not irony in all recurrence to emotion that has played its part in “Auld Lang Syne,” and is now asleep in dust?

God be merciful to us sinners, and make us charitable one to another.

THE END.

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